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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 28 January 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leader today is the Rev James Allardyce, retired hospital chaplain, Wishaw general hospital.

The Rev James Allardyce (Retired Hospital Chaplain, Wishaw General Hospital): I worked as a hospital chaplain for 20 years, 18 of them part time and the last two full time. Retirement has given me an opportunity to look back and reflect on some of the changes that have taken place over those 20 years.

When I started, chaplaincy was almost exclusively the domain of the church. Appointments were made by the local presbytery or diocese and were invariably ministers or priests with perhaps a deacon or nun to assist them. Very early in my career, I learned to read the signs that a patient did not want to speak to a minister. You know the kind of thing: the newspaper lifted up in front of the face, the feigned sleep—things like that. I suppose that I could not blame those patients. I was, after all, wearing my badge of office, the dog collar. For my last two years all that changed. I stopped wearing my collar.

Chaplaincy is now, of course, a part of the national health service in Scotland and an associated healthcare profession, and I have no doubt that the changes that have been made to chaplaincy—or, to give it its proper name, spiritual care—have made a difference to patients and staff alike. If you have someone who is a professional listener on hand to spend time with, you can make the long day in hospital a bit more bearable. Staff, too, can confide in their chaplain knowing that what they say is kept in confidence. Religious needs can also be taken care of, either by the chaplain or by the person's own religious representative.

Where do we go now? The next direction is towards person-centred care. We must recognise that each patient is an individual and that one size of spiritual care does not fit all. Similarly, we must continue to acknowledge that each individual is part of our society, so spiritual care must reflect both individualism and collectivity.

Spiritual care could prove to be invaluable as other healthcare professions become more and more involved with the practicalities of easing the medical condition of the patient. An individual who

can spend time listening to a patient's concerns, sympathise with the patient and communicate that patient's concerns to the medical staff will surely make a difference to the patient's wellbeing.

Topical Question Time

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): If anybody wishes to ask a supplementary to question 2 of topical questions, I ask them to send a wee note to me as soon as possible so that I can allocate as much time between the two questions as I can. Because so many members wish to ask a supplementary to question 1, in the name of Alison McInnes, I intend to take Alison McInnes, followed by members from the north-east, followed by members from the south, followed by members from Edinburgh and Fife. All the questions will be fairly close together.

If everybody understood that—probably better than I explained it—I call Alison McInnes to ask question 1.

Fire and Police Control Rooms (Closure)

1. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the closure of fire and police control rooms and service centres. (S4T-00586)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service proposals, which will enhance the service that is offered to the public, are subject to approval by the respective boards this week. New jobs will be created as the Inverness control room is expanded to become the new national control centre for Scotland. In Aberdeen, Police Scotland will strengthen the offshore resource and establish a multi-agency facility, and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has established a fire investigation unit and will invest in the Portlethen training and development centre.

It is right for the services to consider the issue at this time. Our budgets are being squeezed by the Westminster Government, and it is crucial that the services ensure that resources are used in the most effective and efficient way. Scotland is safer now than it was, and the proposals will help to sustain the hard-fought gains that we have delivered since 2007.

We have a policy of no compulsory redundancies, so staff who are affected will be offered alternative posts or retrained to help them to find suitable employment.

Alison McInnes: Five out of eight fire control rooms are to close, and six out of 10 police control rooms and service centres are to shut. Hundreds of staff are shell-shocked and I fear that many people will have no option but to accept so-called voluntary redundancy, because many of them cannot afford to move up to 200 miles, uprooting

their families or leaving their homes and lives behind. People tell me that to all intents and purposes, despite the cabinet secretary's protestations, their discharge will be compulsory.

Yesterday the cabinet secretary visited police facilities in Dumfries and said that he regrets the job losses. Will he also travel to Aberdeen, to Glasgow, to Glenrothes, to Inverness and to Stirling and personally apologise to the hundreds of staff whose job losses his policy—his centralisation agenda—has caused?

Kenny MacAskill: I think that everyone accepts such things with a heavy heart when they come around, whether they come from the board or the chief. Such matters affect people's livelihoods. That is why this Government has always had a commitment to no compulsory redundancies, which we expect the boards and agencies that operate with us to maintain. That stands in stark contrast to the action of the United Kingdom Government, in which the member's party is in coalition.

Yes, I have a heavy heart. I will meet other representatives as I meet Unison—something that I think has occurred only since I came into office.

We are acting to ensure that we are able to protect local services and provide the best technology that is available, to keep our communities as safe as possible as we face the challenges of the 21st century, allied with the challenges that the coalition Government down in Westminster has imposed on us.

Alison McInnes: The cabinet secretary wants to dodge his responsibility, of course. However, he set up the single force, he hand-picked members of the authority, he took democracy out of the system and he took away any avenue of appeal against such decisions. Community planning partners such as local authorities, which were once integral to decision making, have told me that they were left in the dark. They were left to find out about the closures on the news.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 places a duty on the police and fire services—and on ministers—

“to participate in community planning.”

Does the cabinet secretary regret that his new national police force pays no heed to those duties? Will he urgently take steps to ensure that he fulfils his duty as a minister by ruling the process out of order and sending the services back to the drawing board?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely not. The new Police Service of Scotland is doing a remarkably good job. I accept that individuals are having to suffer pain as jobs are lost. However, when I was down in Dumfries and Galloway I met armed

response officers. Prior to the Police Service of Scotland's establishment, Dumfries and Galloway did not have mobile armed response vehicles; it now has two, which attended an armed robbery in Dumfries on Sunday night. I was told that the helicopter that is part of the Police Service of Scotland would come to the area today to search for someone who is missing. I met officers from the rape investigation unit, who welcomed the national rape investigation unit and the additional expertise that will be available to help them to deal with major incidents. We are seeing the enhancement of and improvement on what was an outstanding service from the legacy force.

I point out that Ms McInnes has asked me to stay out of directing and becoming involved with the chief or with the Scottish Police Authority board. In a press release on 1 December 2012, she said:

"We urgently need a resolution that protects the independence of the Chief Constable and Scotland's police."

Her colleague Willie Rennie, who is sitting next to her, said:

"People want police and fire services to be laser focussed on local needs, not subject to political control from ministerial offices."

We are seeing the delivery on the ground of an outstanding police service. We are adhering to the need to ensure that the police are not politicised or subject to direction, whether by me or by any future Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The Aberdeen fire and police control room staff in my constituency have provided a high-quality service for many years. I am dismayed at the proposals by the fire board and the Police Authority to close those facilities, and I have let them know my opinion. Does the cabinet secretary know whether the fire board and the Police Authority have considered pooling their resources to share control rooms? If not, should they consider doing so? I would, of course, propose Aberdeen as an ideal location for hosting a joint control room.

Kenny MacAskill: The member makes many valid points. First, I, too, have visited Bucksburn and Queen Street over the years and I agree with Kevin Stewart that the staff there have provided an outstanding service. He mentioned the pooling and sharing of resources. That matter has been raised with the boards. Indeed, Vic Emery, the chair of the Scottish Police Authority, is seeking to pursue it. The Government thinks that the idea has a lot of merit, so we are encouraging the boards and the services to do that. As I say, it is not simply a matter for the police and fire services; there are other-blue light services that should work together more.

We see some elements of good practice, but we concur with Kevin Stewart's point. As I say, I am aware that Vic Emery has raised the matter and that he will be pursuing it over forthcoming months and years.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the Bucksburn service centre is located in my constituency. A number of my constituents are employed at that facility and at the Aberdeen control rooms. As Kevin Stewart has mentioned, those facilities have a reputation for excellence and are highly regarded. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the quality of service provided must be an important factor in any decision that the boards take?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely—I concur fully. I echo the points that I made to Kevin Stewart. The service given has been exemplary and the work is outstanding, as is the case for all the legacy forces. The quality of service provided has been a criterion that the board must take into account.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am not sure that the cabinet secretary is aware just how much anger there is in the north-east about Friday's decisions, which were made without, according to many people, proper consultation. Increasingly, questions are being asked about whether the important decisions have been taken based on facts and what is needed on the ground. It is not acceptable for Government ministers to hide behind operational matters. Will the cabinet secretary have the decision stalled and instruct Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to carry out a credible consultation on the proposals?

Kenny MacAskill: If the member is asking me to give a direction to the police and fire boards and their chiefs, then the answer is no. I repeat the points that I made to Alison McInnes. We accept the desire of the chamber, enshrined in the legislation that we introduced, to ensure that there be no political interference by the current or any future Cabinet Secretary for Justice in what are important operational matters. The situation is one for them.

What Nanette Milne says is a bit rich. I accept the pain and the doubtless and understandable anger that some people will have, but when we contrast the position with the situation south of the border, where the fire and rescue service is on strike and the relationship between the Tory Government and the police is one that none of us would have ever imagined would get to such an appalling state, this Government does not need any lectures from the Conservative Party.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary agree that relocating

some services from Aberdeen to Dundee is the opposite of centralisation for the people Nanette Milne, Alison McInnes and I represent across the North East?

Kenny MacAskill: I am happy to discuss matters with the member and with Alison McInnes. As I say, I will visit Aberdeen and Inverness very shortly. I recognise the on-going outstanding work. Work will need to be carried out by the Scottish Police Authority and the board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to decide on the new landscape not only with regard to command and control centres but with regard to other aspects of the national services to ensure that there is a fair dispersal around the country. However, the whole ethos behind moving to single services was to ensure that we maintain delivery locally, with the bobby on the beat and the fire station in the community, at the same time as providing access to national resources such as helicopter support, armed response or significant investigative units.

The Presiding Officer: We move to questions from members from the south of Scotland.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be well aware of the anger over the announcement in Dumfries, where 34 civilians will lose their jobs or be relocated to Glasgow. Does the cabinet secretary not agree that that is compulsory redundancy in all but name? Does he not also agree with many people in the area that the closure should not take place without full consultation? Does he agree that Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority ought to defer their decision until they have undertaken a full consultation with the public, members of the police force and members of civilian staff?

Kenny MacAskill: I discussed the matter with the local commander, Kate Thomson, yesterday. There will, of course, be the opportunity for staff to relocate to other remaining control rooms, and those in Glasgow and Motherwell are the closest. However, this is not simply about transferring to other control rooms. Retraining will be offered so that those whose jobs are going have the opportunity to consider working in other areas of the police service and the police family, which is not simply those who operate in uniform or in civilian clothes with a warrant card. Other opportunities are available locally, whether in Dumfries or Stranraer, and retraining will be offered.

To the eternal credit of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, prior to advertising locally the next round of recruitment for firefighters, it prioritised giving those whose jobs are going the opportunity to become firefighters. Several people who were civilian staff have taken up that opportunity and are currently training to become

firefighters, and that opportunity will remain available. That is to the credit of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in Dumfries and Galloway as in other areas of the country.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): Concerns are being expressed by my constituents across Dumfries and Galloway, particularly about the fact that the proposal will be considered by the SPA board in such a short time—it will consider it this Thursday. Does the cabinet secretary consider that six days' notice of a change that has significant consequences for Dumfries and Galloway is a sufficient level of engagement or in the spirit of partnership working?

Kenny MacAskill: I heard from the deputy leader of the council and the SNP group as well as from the council leader, and I know their position. I was also grateful that Detective Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick went down there and engaged. There will be on-going discussions between the trade union, staff representatives and the board, and the member would require to address the matter to the police.

These matters have been subject to review for some time and have been discussed in my continuing discussions with Unison. It would also be fair to say that we currently have in the region of 200 to 300 members of civilian support staff in the police who have made an application for voluntary redundancy but whom we are unable to release until such decisions are made.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I understand that the staff who are affected by this abysmal proposal, members of the public, unions and politicians have the right to submit a counterproposal in which they can argue the case for an alternative outcome. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how that can possibly be done within the two-week window of opportunity that exists for them to do so?

Kenny MacAskill: The member can raise that with the board, whose representatives will be in discussion directly with the union and representatives. As I said to Aileen McLeod, this has been a matter of on-going discussion between me and Unison, the major representative union, although I also meet Unite and the Scottish Police Federation. Discussions between unions and staff have been on-going for some considerable time, and matters have also been open for some time with regard to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. If the member has counterproposals to make, he should speak to Mr Emery and the Scottish Police Authority.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary explain in more detail the consultation process and what plans there are for local policing in the area going forward?

Kenny MacAskill: The plans for local policing going forward are to build on the outstanding legacy service in Dumfries and Galloway. As I said in an earlier answer, we have seen the addition of two mobile armed response vehicles, which I think are beneficial and long overdue given the difficulties and challenges that are faced, as was evident on Sunday night. There is also the ability to access the helicopter and the new road traffic unit, of which I have met the inspector and his crew.

As I said, the management and the Scottish Police Authority will continue to consult with the unions. There have been discussions—albeit truncated—between the SPA and police.

We will maintain what I believe the people of Dumfries and Galloway want, which is a visible police presence in their community. We are maintaining bobbies north of the border, while the numbers are haemorrhaging south of the border.

At the same time, we are, as a result of moving to the single service, getting access to the specialist resources that are necessary in every part of Scotland in the 21st century. No area in Scotland can work on the basis that it will not require to address gun crime, access the helicopter, or deal with specialist investigations into rape, sexual offences and so on. Local areas get the best of both worlds: local police are maintained, and access to all those specialist resources will be available when it is required.

The Presiding Officer: Members will note that we have arrived at 20 minutes past 2. I intend to continue with topical questions until all the supplementary questions to question 1 have been asked. We will then move to question 2.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary add anything on the nature of the consultation process that will take place on the proposals?

Kenny MacAskill: That will be a matter for the boards of both authorities, the chief fire officer and the police to discuss with the unions. Given the nature of the issues, it is important that the unions and the staff representatives are the primary people involved in articulation and engagement.

I will do all that I can—as I have done in the past months and years—to encourage those discussions. That will ensure that the relationships between Unison and the Scottish Police Authority, and between the Fire Brigades Union Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board, continue and that those who require retraining or who wish to take the benefit of voluntary redundancy have their position represented.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary aware that the proposed closure

of Tollcross fire control room in Edinburgh, where significant expertise has been built up over many years, has caused real concern to the public and to my constituents who work there? They feared that public safety in the capital, and Scotland's resilience to emergency, would be hindered and undermined. Does he recognise the huge relief that will be felt by MSPs and the public throughout the city if Tollcross's future is now to be secured?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I am very grateful for the service that is provided in Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland, whether by full-time or retained firefighters. I engage with my own fire service at local stations in Newcraighall and Marionville in my constituency, and I have no doubt that the news will come as a relief there. Clearly, it will be tinged with the sadness that is felt elsewhere, but we are trying to provide the best service for the whole of Scotland, wherever people are.

The Presiding Officer: Another couple of members wish to ask questions; I ask them to be very brief.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): What consideration, if any, was given to keeping the current system and using the new information technology system more effectively in existing control rooms?

Kenny MacAskill: That is just not possible. There is not one single IT system, but a multiplicity of systems across the board. The reason that we require to move is that in some instances the technology is very aged, and in other instances it is simply unable to locate and speak to other areas. The change is about addressing that.

As a member of the Justice Committee, Ms Mitchell will know that one of the major priorities—if not the major priority—for the chief is to ensure that the police computer systems are brought up to date for the 21st century, in the control rooms as well as for operational policing.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary indicated that support staff in the fire service are being retrained. Is he not struck by the fact that so many staff have been kept in the dark right until the last minute, and have been offered no counselling on alternative retraining? The controversy that has been created is so passionate that it is time that the cabinet secretary spoke to Mr Emery and asked for some consideration of staff needs.

Kenny MacAskill: I meet Mr Emery regularly, and I did so a matter of days—or a week—ago. To be fair to Mr Emery, he has considered applications for voluntary redundancy from between 200 and 300 individuals whom he has been unable to allow to go. Discussions have been on-going and will continue to be so—that is

the commitment that I can make on Mr Emery's behalf.

Air Pollution Monitoring

2. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the air pollution monitoring results for 2013. (S4T-00582)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government is committed to working with partner agencies such as local authorities to tackle air quality in areas where it is a problem. Although we have seen nationally a 65 per cent decrease in nitrogen oxide against a European Union target of 41 per cent, a 78 per cent decrease in sulphur dioxide against a target of 63 per cent, and a 58 per cent decrease in particulates against a target of 30 per cent between 1990 and 2011, we recognise that more can be done. That is why we recently consulted on proposals for further action to improve air quality, and we expect to set out the next steps later this year.

The outcome of that work will help to support local authorities and other partners to take action, given their responsibility to declare air quality management areas where air quality falls below standard. The Scottish Government, working with local partners, will target its efforts to deliver real improvements in those areas where air quality improvements are still required.

Claire Baker: It is estimated that nearly 1,600 people die prematurely each year in Scotland as a direct result of exposure to poor-quality air, with air pollution contributing to heart attacks and lung disease. It is clear that it is a serious issue. However, although local authorities have the lead responsibility they do not necessarily have the levers to ensure that they can deliver. We need greater leadership from the Scottish Government and a firm commitment from it on when communities will be able to be confident that the air that they breathe is not harmful to their health. As the minister will know, we are currently breaking the legal limits in a number of areas. When will that be reversed? Will the low-emissions strategy commit to a timescale to improve Scotland's air quality?

Paul Wheelhouse: There were a number of questions there. The first thing to say to Claire Baker and other members is that, for the reasons that she set out, we certainly recognise the severity of the risk to people of poor air quality. The Scottish Government is at an early stage in developing the low-emissions strategy, but I assure the member that it is being taken forward. We recently had a consultation on local air quality management and received about 160 responses, which we are in the process of looking through

and are developing proposals to deal with the issues that have been raised.

I certainly recognise that local authorities and local agencies are the lead bodies in this respect, but the Scottish Government is playing a strong partnership role in a number of areas, particularly on transport emissions through the Scottish transport emissions partnership, or STEP. We are working with local partners to try to address some of the pinch points.

I am sure that the member will already know that Glasgow is the one location where we suspect that there will still be a problem beyond 2015 because of the missing link on the M8. However, we have programmed expenditure to address that and it should be dealt with by about 2017-18 on current projections. Scotland is in a comparatively strong position compared to the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of our achievements on air quality standards, which are a high priority for the Scottish Government.

Claire Baker: In his first reply the minister said that emissions have fallen since 1990, but that is largely attributed to the closure of steel plants rather than a reduction in poor air quality in urban areas. In 2010, transport emissions accounted for 24 per cent of Scotland's total emissions but in 2011 for over 25 per cent. Overall, transport emissions have increased since 1990. There is also worrying research that shows that deprived areas have the highest levels of poor air quality. Does the minister share my concern that the active travel campaign is helpful as far as it goes but that there needs to be greater emphasis on reducing traffic congestion in urban areas and on ensuring that we have the right levers in place to make that happen? Does he think that that should include a clear commitment to addressing air quality in the final national planning framework 3 and Scottish planning policy?

Paul Wheelhouse: I think that I have already made it clear that the Government has a clear commitment to reducing the problems of poor air quality in Glasgow and other urban areas, and in some isolated locations in rural Scotland. We have a challenge in terms of transport emissions in that, despite improvements in fuel quality and the energy efficiency of engines, because of growth in car use transport-related emissions are not impacted on to the degree that we would like.

We have regulation of vehicles in Europe and, indeed, at UK level but not in Scotland. However, we are working hard to ensure that through STEP and other initiatives we tackle transport. The Minister for Transport and Veterans, Keith Brown, is working very hard with a number of bodies to try to tackle active travel. I have taken part in a number of joint meetings with Keith Brown, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Transport Scotland

to try to address some of the needs in relation to active travel.

I assure the member that the matter remains a high priority for us, for the reasons that she rightly set out. The health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland is a key priority for the Government. I assure her that we are taking active steps to try to address what is a lingering problem but, I hope, one that will be addressed by about 2015 in the vast majority of Scotland and 2017-18 at the remaining site that I mentioned on the M8.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I am concerned to note the inclusion of Crieff High Street in the monitoring analysis report. Will the minister advise me what steps can be taken initially and as a matter of urgency to seek to tackle the problem? Will he also undertake to seek discussions with Perth and Kinross Council to see what joint working can be undertaken to move matters forward as quickly as possible?

Paul Wheelhouse: Annabelle Ewing raises a good point, because, as I said, the issue is not just about urban Scotland. There are pockets of poor air quality in our rural communities as well.

Local authorities have a range of tools available to them to deal with air quality issues, including the ability to declare air quality management areas, and financial support is available from the Scottish Government to help to implement actions that will lead to improvements in air quality in those situations. We are providing financial and practical assistance to Perth and Kinross Council to develop an air quality action plan for Crieff. I am happy to meet the member if she requires any further information on that.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister declare whether the Scottish Government is using economic instruments to incentivise the reduction of air pollution? If it is not, will it consider doing that? Has the minister considered different options for how the general public can also be involved in the reduction of air pollution?

Paul Wheelhouse: Jamie McGrigor makes a good point. As he will know, we made it clear through the report on proposals and policies 2 process that about half of what we need to do on emissions relating to climate change is down to behavioural change among members of the public, ourselves included. That clearly has a knock-on impact on air quality as well.

A number of local authorities are actively taking steps to increase the amount of tree planting in their areas. The City of Edinburgh Council is a good example of that, and Glasgow City Council and Fife Council are doing similar things. There are a number of measures that we can take as

individuals, communities and local authorities to tackle poor air quality. However, the fiscal levers that there might be to try to influence the use of private vehicles is clearly a matter that is reserved to the UK Government, and there are some European targets in relation to the regulation of vehicles. It is therefore not entirely within our gift to tackle the issues.

However, I assure the member that we are doing everything that we can, within our powers, to try to change behaviours and ensure that we reduce the problem of air pollution in our urban areas.

The Presiding Officer: That ends topical question time.

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08840, in the name of David Stewart, on the report on tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland. It might be helpful to the minister and members if I indicate at the outset that we have some time in hand. If members wish to take interventions or take a wee bit longer to develop their points, I am sure that that will find favour with the Presiding Officers.

I call on David Stewart to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Public Petitions Committee.

14:33

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The Public Petitions Committee's role, in my view, is to shine a light into the dark corners of Scotland, and there can be no darker corner than child sexual exploitation. The committee's inquiry concluded with 28 powerful and significant recommendations. I hope that, in time, the Scottish Government will accept them all and make a contribution to better and more co-ordinated practice by professionals across Scotland. If we save one child from sexual exploitation, the inquiry will have been worth doing. The evidence that was given to us over the past 10 months was occasionally harrowing and sometimes distressing, but the committee did not flinch from its task just because it was difficult.

My thanks go to Barnardo's, staff from which are in the gallery this afternoon, for lodging the petition and for its consistently high levels of co-operation and support. I also place on record my personal thanks to all the committee members for their contributions, and particularly to Chic Brodie, the deputy convener, who chaired two evidence sessions for me following my Achilles injury last year. Anne Peat and her team of clerks were first class, and many thanks go to them all. I also put on record the committee's thanks to our adviser, Sarah Nelson, who provided valuable direction and insight as a result of her many years of research in the field. The committee wishes her well with future projects.

This is the committee's first inquiry report in this parliamentary session. I welcome the opportunity today to highlight our work, the evidence that we heard and our findings.

I will explain a little about the background to the inquiry. I have heard it said that the Public Petitions Committee does not do inquiries, but inquiries are exactly what the committee does day

in and day out. We have mini-inquiries on the back of nearly every public petition that is lodged. However, the committee's investigation into tackling child sexual exploitation was a longer and more in-depth inquiry. Our work culminated in the publication of a report that contains a number of recommendations for action. I look forward to hearing the minister's responses later.

The subject warranted a more in-depth approach. I understand that it straddles a number of subject committee remits but, given those committees' legislative loads, we decided to undertake the inquiry ourselves. The committee's work started with the petition that Barnardo's Scotland lodged in July 2011. Barnardo's urged the Scottish Government to commission new research into the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland and called for new, dedicated Scottish Government guidelines.

When we received the petition, Barnardo's told the committee that it was seriously concerned that the true nature and scale of CSE in Scotland were not known and that CSE was on the increase. It saw a pressing need to carry out research in Scotland to assess the prevalence of CSE, along the lines of research that has been done in England. Barnardo's had been in dialogue with the Scottish Government, but it told us that it had received no commitment to take action.

The feeling was that, in times of economic pressures, local authorities would find it difficult to justify additional spending to provide services to support victims of child sexual exploitation without having clear and robust evidence of the scale of the problem. It was felt that research was needed to provide the clear evidence that is required.

The guidelines that are in place date back to 2003. They focus mainly on young people who have run away from home or who have been exploited through becoming involved in prostitution. They do not take account of the modern reality of young people's use of technology and the risks that they can face from online grooming and social networking sites. Not just runaways and children who have been drawn into prostitution are at risk of sexual exploitation; sadly, all our children are at risk. The risks are not always from older people; children's peers can just as easily be the perpetrators.

The guidance needs to be updated to recognise that. We are pleased that, as a result of the committee's interest, the Scottish Government is taking steps to update the material. We also welcome the fact that the minister commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to do preliminary research work in Scotland. That research assessed the information that is available on the prevalence in Scotland by looking at the existing statistical base, and soundings were taken from

professionals on the extent and nature of CSE in Scotland.

When that research became available, it confirmed to the committee the point that tackling child sexual exploitation needs to be given much higher priority in Scotland. The committee decided to move the issue up the agenda by conducting its own inquiry and calling for evidence. We agreed a specific remit for our inquiry. The committee was aware of work that was being done elsewhere and did not want to duplicate that. We agreed to establish the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Scotland.

Our first call for evidence was aimed at getting the views of service providers working in the field, often in the third sector, and of service users—the young people. We posed a number of specific questions. That approach worked well and we received powerful evidence and accounts from across Scotland from young people who had found themselves victims.

I will highlight two anonymised case studies. A 28-year-old female from Fife told us that her exploitation began when she was just 12 or 13, when peers pressured her into sexual activity and she was given drugs and alcohol in exchange for sexual favours. She said that counselling had been helpful but that better awareness is required. She pointed out that, in her experience, exploitation among peers is common—particularly among young girls—and that more needs to be done in schools to educate young people and enable them to be more resilient.

The second case study was about James, who was 15. He comes from a chaotic home and identifies himself as gay. His mother had significant mental health difficulties and attempted suicide, occasionally in James's presence. James experienced violence at the hands of his mother's partners and witnessed domestic violence. After a serious incident, he was taken into a local authority children's home.

James is shy and he began to make contact with men through social networking and dating sites. He initially lied about his age but was always honest when he met anyone. All the men he met were adults in the age range of 20 to 45, and all were aware of James's real age.

Because of his early life experience, James had difficulties with assessing risk and judging character, so he was vulnerable to being groomed. He was raped and contracted sexually transmitted infections that led to his hospitalisation. That further damaged his self-esteem and increased his vulnerability.

James is now receiving support to help him to recognise and build positive relationships, and to reduce his feelings of isolation and inadequacy.

Those are two of the many young people's accounts that the committee received. I urge all members to read the other testimonies that we received. For the avoidance of doubt, the accounts all come from Scottish young people. The experiences that they told us about and the crimes that were committed against them all happened here in Scotland.

One of the deficiencies with the existing research is that very little of the evidence in the public domain comes from young people themselves. That is clearly not because it does not exist; it is out there. The organisations and bodies, mostly from the third sector, pick up the pieces by providing counselling, support, and practical assistance, but hearing from young people was a vital part of the committee's inquiry. However, although sadly there is no shortage of young people who have been sexually exploited in Scotland, the young people themselves were understandably reluctant to come forward to speak to us. The agencies that we enlisted to assist us were keen to help, but for understandable reasons such as shame, embarrassment, fear or a desire to forget, young people were not willing to be in direct contact with us. The case studies that we received were all anonymised and provided by the service providers. I record my thanks to them for helping us to get the voices of young people out there and into the chamber this afternoon.

The second stage of evidence gathering was directed more at statutory bodies. We also asked them a series of specific questions. By doing that, we were able to ensure that the evidence that we received directly addressed the issues that we had identified in the inquiry remit as our priority.

We received 38 written submissions, all of which provided considered views. It was notable that a number of identical issues arose time after time. The first one that I will talk about is the definition of child sexual exploitation. No one in the chamber today can have failed to have heard about some of the ways in which children can be sexually exploited. We only have to pick up a newspaper, or turn on the radio or the television to hear about another case that has come to light in which impressionable young people have been sexually exploited.

I should emphasise that it is not just girls who are exploited. Boys have also been groomed by older people, gangs or groups, or have been befriended by peers who have ended up exploiting them sexually.

Most of the recently reported cases have been in England, and it is shocking to hear the details, some of which are only now coming to light. It is important that the lessons from such cases are learned regardless of where they come from, be it England, Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

The member will be aware that adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse have welcomed the report, which focuses on child sexual exploitation, which includes childhood sexual abuse. As committee convener, does he think that there is a need to emphasise the fact that the majority of the perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse are known to the family and are in a position of trust, or are even members of the family, whereas child sexual exploitation tends to take place outside the family circle?

David Stewart: The member has made some interesting points and I am happy to go along to her cross-party group in April to go through those points in a lot more detail. I thank the member for the intervention.

We increasingly live in a borderless world in which the internet and social networking sites mean that crimes are not confined to any one particular geographical area. New ways in which young people can become prey to those who seek to sexually exploit them are emerging all the time.

In Scotland, the current definition of childhood sexual exploitation—which is from 2003—is:

“Any involvement of a child or young person below 18 in a sexual activity for which remuneration of cash or in kind is given to a young person or a third party or persons. The perpetrator will have power over the child by virtue of one or more of the following—age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and economic and other resources e.g. access to drugs”.

That is the definition that has been used by those tasked with tackling these crimes in Scotland. Does that definition really capture the many ways in which child sexual exploitation can manifest? Does everyone agree that the definition is still relevant and captures the different forms that such exploitation can take?

Clearly, in order to tackle such exploitation, we all need to know what it is and be able to recognise it. There needs to be a common understanding among young people themselves, parents, carers, professionals and the public of what forms sexual exploitation can take. It would appear from the evidence that the committee received that there is not a common understanding. There is confusion around what child sexual exploitation is. Must it always involve an exchange of cash or remuneration in kind? If it does not, does that mean that it is not recognised or recorded as child sexual exploitation? What about situations in which a young person is coerced into sexually exploitative practices due to a desire to fit in or be accepted? There may well not be any exchange of money or remuneration in kind but due to a strong desire to fit in or perhaps to come across as being mature, a young person might be vulnerable to being sexually exploited.

On definitions, child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse. However, I know from the evidence that we received that some organisations—including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—do not see and do not support any distinction between child abuse and child sexual exploitation. We have a situation in which there is no united view on whether there should be a distinction, much less on what child sexual exploitation looks like, what it is and how to recognise it.

Partly for that reason, the committee’s overarching recommendation in its report is that a national, comprehensive strategy is required. The national strategy needs to include an updated definition—one that recognises the extent to which online activity is now part of all of our lives and the risks that that can present for our young people. The strategy also needs to provide direction to ensure that best practice is shared and the action that is required to do that is co-ordinated. That action will include training, public awareness raising, addressing young people’s vulnerabilities and ensuring that the necessary services are supported and sustainable.

On sustainable services, I turn to the issue of refuges for young people. About 9,000 young people go missing in Scotland each year. Two of the case studies that the committee received illustrate only too starkly the connection between young people running away from home and the risks of sexual assault and exploitation. I do not propose to go into detail but the case studies are recounted in the committee report.

Since 1995, our legislation has made provision for refuges for the under-16s. However, very few refuges were ever established and very little use was made of them by statutory agencies. As of last year, Scotland had only one such refuge, in the Glasgow area, which was run by Aberlour Child Care Trust. We were told by Aberlour that it had tried to work with local authorities and other relevant agencies, including the police, to encourage referrals but it was felt that there had not been an understanding of the value of a refuge and sadly we heard last year that the refuge had shut down because it was no longer viable. We did not get to the heart of why the refuge was closed but we have called for that to be investigated further; the minister may want to comment on that issue in her closing speech.

Those are just a few of the issues in the committee report that I wanted to highlight in my opening remarks. I await others’ contributions with interest and I look forward in particular to the minister’s speech.

I commend the committee report to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Public Petitions Committee's 1st Report, 2014 (Session 4), *Report on tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland* (SP Paper 449).

14:48

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I thank David Stewart and all the members of the Public Petitions Committee for their comprehensive work on child sexual exploitation. This is a debate that stretches beyond the chamber and I welcome the important contribution that their report makes to that wider debate as well as Barnardo's determination to bring that public debate before Parliament.

Almost exactly a year ago, I spoke at a Holyrood child protection conference at a time when stories of abuse and exploitation of the most vulnerable members of our society were starting to be heard—stories of children and young people being exploited for their simple need for love and affection; and stories of those who could not speak to anyone about what they were suffering too often denying what was being done to them and rejecting the very support and protection that could end their misery.

As every member will have felt the first time they heard about what happened in Rotherham or Rochdale, or about what Jimmy Savile did, I felt a mixture of horror, anger and sadness and, above all, the overwhelming need to act and to act quickly. That is why I set up the ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation, with the aim of harnessing rapidly the collective need to address the issue, using the expertise of the services that work most closely with the victims of child sexual exploitation: local authorities, the Crown Office and the police, inspection bodies and key children's organisations such as Children in Scotland, Aberlour and Barnardo's. The group reported to ministers in December, and I have asked it to continue monitoring the work in Scotland on child sexual exploitation.

The group endorsed much of the work that is already under way in Scotland but, like the Public Petitions Committee's report, it saw that more could be done and that there was absolutely no room for complacency. Perhaps most important, the group recognised that child sexual exploitation is not a stand-alone issue that can be fixed through a series of eye-catching initiatives. Sexual exploitation is one of the most vile forms of child abuse and one of the most pernicious attacks on a child's or young person's wellbeing. For those reasons, we need to ensure that we have in place the strongest approach to child protection and to supporting our children's wellbeing.

Over the past few years, that has been our ambition on child protection. We have modernised

our unique children's hearings system through new legislation. We undertook a major review of our child protection procedures and produced new child protection guidance, which we are further refreshing with a dedicated section on child sexual exploitation. We developed Scotland's first comprehensive risk assessment toolkit to help professionals to identify signs of abuse and neglect. We are working with Barnardo's on dedicated tools to better identify sexual exploitation.

At the same time, we are putting in place a unique and internationally lauded approach to placing children's and young people's wellbeing at the centre of service design, planning and delivery. I am sure that I do not need to tell members about getting it right for every child, nor about how, under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, all children and young people up to the age of 18 will have access to a named person, who will be able to pick up and act on the signs of potential abuse. For children and young people with particular needs and vulnerabilities, services will now have to plan and work together to support them through a child's plan.

Margaret Mitchell: Earlier, the minister mentioned the Rochdale case in greater Manchester. In that case, the national health service crisis intervention team helped to expose the abuse. Given that, will there be a concerted effort to ensure that health care providers are alert to and can recognise sexual coercion, rather than assuming that young people are involved in consensual yet still illegal sexual relationships?

Aileen Campbell: I thank Margaret Mitchell for the clear interest that she takes in working to ensure that some of the issues that we are discussing are dealt with adequately. I mentioned that we have done a number of pieces of work to refresh guidance. In November 2012, we published the "National Framework for Child Protection learning and development in Scotland 2012" and the risk assessment framework. More specifically on the point about health professionals, in December 2012 we updated the pink book, which is for health professionals, on child protection issues. I hope that many of the issues that the member refers to about how we can empower and help health professionals are captured in that pink book, which was published just over a year ago.

We need to keep under review the services that directly support those who experience child sexual exploitation. We need to know which services have the best impact and how they can be sustained within a service framework that must address a wide range of child protection issues. We also need to understand why some services, not least refuges for runaways, have struggled to

remain sustainable. I will therefore ask the ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation to explore how we can better understand and promote the most effective services to support children and young people. I hope that that will give some comfort to the committee and its convener, given his remarks about investigating further issues to do with refuges.

Against that background of how we are addressing the needs of children and young people overall, we have also taken a range of actions across Government to address child sexual exploitation. We have committed to understanding the issue better because, like the committee, we recognise the gaps in our knowledge of such abuse. We commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to examine the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in Scotland. We have also supported work, which is currently being piloted in Forth valley, to improve ways of identifying and collating information on child sexual exploitation cases at a local level. Other areas might require more research, and we will continue to review such research needs.

We are working to ensure that all local areas have procedures and protocols in place to address child sexual exploitation. In the national child protection guidance, we will set out our expectations that every local area has such a protocol and will develop a national good practice model.

Schools also have a particularly important role in identifying and preventing child sexual exploitation. National work is helping to support that. Children and young people receive education on topics such as developing appropriate relationships, protection from abuse and keeping themselves safe from harm from early on in their education right up until they leave school.

In that context, the work on improving internet safety among children and young people is critical. In early December, the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages and I chaired a summit on internet safety, which drew in experts from education, the third sector, the private sector and law-enforcement bodies. The members of that summit also included Jackie Brock, who is involved with the ministerial working group, to ensure that there is a sequencing of knowledge about what action we need to take. They made a set of recommendations that I have asked the Scottish stakeholder group on internet safety to develop into a series of practical actions that will be reported back to ministers before the end of the year.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): A view is starting to be heard that, rather than police forces, taxpayers and voluntary groups

investigating the actions of people on the internet, internet service providers should have responsibility for that in law, that the cost attached to it should be taken off their bottom line rather than the taxpayers' bottom line and that some companies should desist from taking action on sites that are openly available for young children to engage in.

Aileen Campbell: There are many different issues around internet safety—not least some of the particularly tragic incidents that happened last summer—which is why we held and hosted the summit last year. We clearly need to ensure that young people and parents are empowered to use the internet safely, which is why we brought a number of stakeholders around the table to discuss what we need to do to ensure that safety is maintained.

There are issues with the reserved nature of some of the regulation of internet use but, where we have a responsibility, we are trying to do what we can to allow young people to use the internet safely. It is a great tool—it is a wonderful thing to have access to—but we need to ensure that safety is paramount for young people and that parents know a wee bit more about what their children and young people are doing.

Child sexual exploitation is also a crime—one that cannot be tolerated—and it is important that we do all that we can to ensure that the perpetrators of these terrible crimes are brought to justice and that the risk is properly managed in custody and in the community. A critical element of that is our new single police force. Protecting the public—in particular, the most vulnerable in Scotland's communities—is a key priority for Police Scotland.

Another essential element is having the right legal framework to pursue the crimes. We have strengthened the law on sex crimes by introducing the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009. That modernised the law and replaced a confusing and complex patchwork of common-law and statutory offences that had developed over many decades with the single statutory framework.

We have also improved Scotland's sexual offences prevention order and risk of sexual harm order regimes by expanding the range of conditions that a court may attach to an order. Such orders are available to assist with the management of sex offenders and individuals without a relevant conviction who are assessed as posing a risk of sexual harm.

In addition, the Crown Office has developed a team of expert prosecutors in the national sexual crimes unit specialising in the investigation and prosecution of serious sexual crimes.

We understand the frustration of those who want to do more on that difficult area of crime detection and prosecution. A single, dedicated police force and a Crown Office with specialist expertise can build on our robust legal framework and make important strides in disrupting such crimes in the future, but we will continue to review how the laws are being used and how practice can be improved.

I turn to whether we need a national child sexual exploitation strategy. If that means yet another time-consuming review of what we have done, I do not think that we do need one. We have had a review of what we are doing and I believe that we know what needs to be done. What we must do is act upon that knowledge. I will ask the ministerial working group to corral that collective effort within a national action plan—a document that will be focused on the real and practical things that we are doing and must continue to do in this area.

Once again, I thank David Stewart and the Public Petitions Committee for their work. Hopefully, we can work together as we try to ensure young people's safety in Scotland.

15:00

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Public Petitions Committee for its work in producing the report that we are debating today.

My Labour colleagues and I join members across the chamber in recognising that abuses of power and the exploitation of vulnerable young people should always be condemned.

The personal case studies accompanying the committee report, which have been provided by the third sector organisations that work closely with vulnerable and exploited young people, are truly harrowing and show how important it is that we tackle this issue effectively.

With that in mind, it was reassuring that, in an extremely sensitive and complex area, the report has carefully drawn out several major strands in its findings. The recommendations from the Public Petitions Committee's inquiry are extensive and well thought out. I welcome them being given the consideration that they deserve today, and Scottish Labour supports the majority of the findings that have been published.

As we have heard, the report arose from a petition that was sent to the committee in July 2011 by Barnardo's Scotland, which called for research into child sexual exploitation and the need for new Scottish Government guidelines. The cut them free campaign, run by Barnardo's, is to be congratulated on its effectiveness in

highlighting the issue and on its role in driving the committee's inquiry.

I also acknowledge that the ministerial short-life working group—whose findings we have already heard about from the minister—has been helpful in drawing together a brief analysis of the existing provision in Scotland and elsewhere to tackle child sexual exploitation. However, as the committee report notes, there are a number of areas where further work or research could be undertaken.

As the committee report has highlighted, over the past few years a number of bodies and working groups have examined the issue of child sexual exploitation. There have been various reports on and reviews of the matter, but there are still gaps in our knowledge. Therefore, although I welcome the intention of the short-life ministerial working group to meet in future to review any developments, I am particularly keen that it does so in response to the committee's overarching recommendation for the establishment of a national strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation.

The ministerial short-life working group noted that child protection is everyone's responsibility. It is our collective responsibility to keep our children and young people safe, but we must avoid the risk of collective responsibility leading to a lack of accountability for Government and its agencies.

I was reassured to read the committee's careful consideration of the definition of child sexual exploitation. That understanding on the part of the committee has been important in aiding the development of its numerous recommendations, especially those focusing on preventative measures and the improved education and safeguarding of our young people in the future.

The sensitivities of tackling child sexual exploitation are many. Although the report acknowledges that the issue exists as part of a continuum of child sexual abuse, the committee also recognises the need to focus on sexual exploitation specifically, and I am heartened that it reflects that in the recommendations for a national strategy.

The report urges that a more co-ordinated, less piecemeal approach be taken in taking the issues forward. I believe that to be vital, and the expectation of the committee that the Scottish Government should report regularly to Parliament on its progress is similarly important.

Although it seems that much of the work that has been done on this issue has not been well co-ordinated, there have been some examples of excellent work, including the scoping study by the centre for excellence for looked-after children in Scotland, which was commissioned by the Care

Inspectorate to improve the way in which it inspects services.

The recent scrutiny of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill by the Education and Culture Committee has highlighted just how vulnerable many of our young people are and how often they can be let down by the systems that should be looking after them. The CELCIS research found that a prevalence of child sexual exploitation of at least 25 per cent

“would seem likely for children in the care population”,

and an expectation exists that that figure only increases for older children, girls and children in residential care. However, the data that we have on child sexual exploitation in Scotland is variable. The need to fill in the gaps in the information is one of the key recommendations of the committee report.

Worryingly, there seem to be few children over the age of 12 on child protection registers, and I strongly support the report’s recommendation for a policy investigation into why that is the case. The vulnerability of older children and teenagers to sexual exploitation is clear, and the report effectively highlights the increasing normalisation of sexualised behaviour among young people.

The report’s recommendations on developing education programmes on internet dangers are also to be welcomed, as is the recognition of the need to challenge stereotyped behaviours, which impact on young people, especially women, and can make them vulnerable to exploitation.

I again put on record my thanks to the committee for its hard work in undertaking the inquiry. I look forward to hearing from members from across the chamber during the rest of the afternoon’s debate.

15:05

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I thank David Stewart for his opening speech, introducing the committee’s report. I add my thanks to those who gave evidence, the clerks and others who made the report possible.

This is a difficult report, discussing and seeking to make recommendations, as it does, on a most difficult subject. It immediately became clear to the committee—and this led inexorably to the report’s primary and overarching recommendation—that understanding and policy are essentially adrift in a sea of competing work by seemingly uncoordinated, if well-intended, agencies, initiatives and interventions.

There is a compelling common sense underpinning the conclusion that the Scottish Government should develop a national strategy for

tackling child sexual exploitation. That is not to suggest that there is a dash of amateurism about the efforts that others have been making—far from it. It is clear that there is very considerable experience and depth of commitment on the part of organisations such as Barnardo’s and on the part of individuals.

It became immediately clear that a myriad of inquiries, reviews and investigations are currently in progress across the United Kingdom.

Aileen Campbell: I have said that we want to take all the learning that we have and to have an action plan, so that we can take action, as opposed to having another prolonged review. The briefing from the Aberlour Child Care Trust agrees with that position: the trust believes that there is now a need to take action, as opposed to having yet another prolonged review and only then acting. That point was made by both Aberlour and Barnardo’s.

Jackson Carlaw: I agree with the minister—I hope that I have not been giving a false impression. Any national strategy has to be based on actions, and I welcome what the minister has said about that. If that is what it is about, that is fine—I agree that the last thing that we need now is to have some additional comprehensive review.

The various reviews that have been undertaken will all surely be useful in themselves. However, it is only within the structure of a national strategy that the various conclusions and, even more basically, the understanding of a definition will achieve a clarity of purpose and direction.

The danger with a small d is that, in this subject of intense sensitivities, politicians—unless they come from a background of professional experience, which some do—are inevitably several steps removed from the realities of the issue. The danger is that they wade in with calls for specific actions and recommendations that might make for much action and activity but be misplaced in their purpose.

The committee report notes, for example, that the automatic desire of the committee to meet those who have been affected and to examine their experience at first hand proved impossible, for wholly understandable reasons. Deeply affected and mistrusting, those who have suffered are suspicious and, in many cases, they are still too vulnerable to be subjected to the ham-fisted public or even private examination of well-intentioned politicians. Therefore, it is testimony at second hand on which the committee has drawn and which David Stewart detailed, to an extent, in his speech. Although it is not as satisfactory, it is still compelling.

As David Stewart noted, the intention of the committee was to be helpful. It was therefore

careful not to embrace a remit that would have had it chasing shadows down dozens of avenues. In consequence, it has produced a series of practical recommendations and, through its work, has allowed others to ask other searching questions, not least why there has been such an underuse of the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005.

On the other hand, the recommendations of the report somewhat casually stray into one popular area of policy recommendations for politicians: education. In so many areas of policy, whether public health or whatever, we have become fond, as politicians, of recommending that schools and teachers should take the lead, and in a somewhat generalised way. This report does that to an extent, too, and I am less persuaded by it.

Although we have introduced and enhanced the detail of sexual education in the school curriculum, it is impossible to demonstrate that we have been successful in our intention. We still have alarmingly high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease and there is an ever reducing age of reported sexual intimacy. We have provided no end of facts and practical routes for further assistance and support and yet, in an effort not to obstruct, we have, in the opinion of many, eschewed context and value.

If we are to make a valued educational contribution, it must be one that ensures that we do not counterintuitively promote a greater incidence of that which we are seeking to curtail and prevent. Moreover, the report identifies the all-too-depressing incidence among children who are already in lives that demonstrate recognisable chaotic factors.

At no point does the report talk about families or parents as a positive source of support, which I think is an oversight. Annabel Goldie talked in the previous session of Parliament about parenting. We should not ignore the education of parents, the majority of whom have no experience of this issue themselves but are deeply concerned by the modern world and the opportunities for evil that exist within it.

I know of many parents who will be confronted regularly by newspaper or magazine case histories, which are sometimes willingly sensationalised for reasons that we all recognise and deplore. Those histories can alert parents to a particular tragedy without offering them validated best practice for ensuring the wellbeing of their own children.

There is a case for ensuring that any national strategy looks to produce helpful and informed guidance for parents that is endorsed by

Government. Otherwise, they rely on the anecdotal and, in so doing, can seem to children as if they are removed from the realities of their world. The world has moved on at such a pace that saying, "My mother always used to say", "We won't discuss this further" or "You will not do that" really no longer suffice. Parents need evolving, sensible and practical advice.

On the publication of a report, it can seem that the issue at hand is endemic among the whole population, when in fact the vast majority remain unaffected. The sexual exploitation of children has become widely discussed, just as child abduction was in the past. It is not in any sense a marginal issue, and the report details in the most authoritative and at times harrowing way it can the all-too-often inexplicable dark side of human behaviour.

What I am seeking to say is that any strategy must not become so diluted in order to be national as to lose bite and focus in rooting out actual child sexual exploitation, supporting those affected or prosecuting effectively those who exploit.

I welcome the recommendations on police education, the support of a named individual acting on behalf of children involved in the legal process, the training of front-line police officers to disrupt perpetrators, the greater use of sexual harm orders and, more generally, the effective implementation and use of legal remedies that are already available.

I believe this debate is also an opportunity to pay tribute to the many who have, with the greatest sensitivity, immersed themselves in understanding the world in which this activity takes place in order to lead those who have been traumatised and damaged by it to a safer future. Therefore, I thank Barnardo's, NHS open road, Who Cares? Scotland, the Aberlour Child Care Trust and Say Women, among the dozens of organisations and individuals who have acted and from which written and oral evidence was received.

Like David Stewart, I think it worth pausing to reflect on the closure—even as the work of the committee progressed—of Scotland's only refuge for children who have run away from home, which was operated by Aberlour in the Glasgow area. The loss of this three-bedroom unit is surely by any standard a regressive step, and I hope that further work will be done to establish why the unit was not sustainably viable.

Were the central recommendation of this report—that a national strategy be established—to fall on deaf ears, it would be impossible to conclude other than that child exploitation will continue without our proper understanding of its extent and evolution or the effectiveness of any of

the actions already taken or envisaged. Countless groups will work on, each gathering further understanding but without the authority that a co-ordinated approach may bring.

This is a report in which politicians have tried, with reticence and humility in terms of our understanding and experience, to advance a policy agenda for the good of those affected and against those who perpetrate evil. It is for the Government to step in and provide leadership and to draw on the talent of those who have the experience and commitment. I welcome the minister's focus on actions, rather than further reviews.

The report is bristling with practical, commonsense suggestions, which I hope that the Parliament will commend to the Scottish Government tonight for action.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We move to the open debate. We have a little time in hand. I can offer David Torrance, to be followed by Graeme Pearson, up to seven minutes.

15:14

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I begin by thanking the committee clerking team for their hard work and their efforts in helping us put together the report.

I also thank the numerous organisations, individuals and public bodies involved in the committee's inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Scotland. The contributions and evidence they provided have proved invaluable and have allowed the committee to conduct what I believe is an in-depth examination of the current measures in place to prevent and tackle the sexual exploitation of children in Scotland.

I extend particular gratitude to Barnardo's Scotland, which submitted the public petition that provided the impetus for our inquiry. Its engagement with the committee has been crucial, and I commend it for raising such an important issue with the Scottish Parliament.

The sexual exploitation of children has become a more prominent issue in recent years, largely due to extensive media coverage of child exploitation gangs in various parts of the UK. That has instigated a greater focus on the issue in Scotland, but more must be done to improve the ability of services to identify victims and potential victims of child sexual exploitation, to support those children and to target the predators.

The committee's report makes it clear that data collection on the prevalence of child sexual exploitation in Scotland is inconsistent and underresourced and that there is a need for improved data collection tools. However, from the

information that is available, I was shocked to learn that many of the estimates of prevalence are relatively high. For example, according to case study research undertaken by the centre for excellence for looked-after children in Scotland, around one in four children in care is a victim of child sexual exploitation, and that figure is expected to be considerably higher for some of the most vulnerable groups. That alone indicates that we have much to learn as a nation about how to tackle this despicable crime.

One of the areas on which I would like to focus is the need for more widespread and comprehensive preventive education among young people. In today's society, children are increasingly socialised into believing certain negative stereotypes about boys and girls and about what is normal behaviour in terms of sexual relationships. We need to address such attitudes at an early stage to reduce the risk of children thinking that it is normal or acceptable for anyone to coerce them into engaging in sexual behaviour.

Although there are already some examples of good practice in schools of educating children about healthy relationships, mutual respect and sexual boundaries, the committee found that there is a need to expand such practices much more widely in educational institutions and other youth settings across Scotland. The committee has been made aware of some excellent educational resources, such as those produced by Barnardo's Scotland, that are already freely available. Many of them can be readily accessed via the website of the NWG Network—the national working group for sexually exploited children and young people.

Another aspect of the report that I would like to highlight is the lack of therapeutic and emotional support services available consistently throughout Scotland for young people affected by sexual exploitation. The committee found, throughout the course of our inquiry, that many young people feel that they have no one they can trust to confide in. It appears that there is often a general mistrust of social care workers among victims, due to a fear of being judged and labelled, which may be down to a lack of training and awareness in the sector. We need to break down those barriers or at least ensure the availability of alternative services such as ChildLine, which can offer valuable support when children feel that they have nowhere else to turn.

Connected to that issue is the provision of refuges for those who have broken free from child sexual exploitation and need a temporary base while they make contact with the services that can help them. The committee was informed that Scotland's only such refuge for under-16s—run by Aberlour in the Glasgow area—closed in June

2013 and that there has been no facility in place since.

The availability of a safe place to go might significantly increase the likelihood of victims to seek help and might also play a key role in preventing the re-entry of children into sexual exploitation circles. I therefore strongly support the committee's recommendation that consideration should be given to placing a duty on all local authorities to provide suitable refuges for the victims of child sexual exploitation.

The final matter I would like to address is the role of the third sector in preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation. Throughout the course of our inquiry, it has become overwhelmingly clear that charities and voluntary organisations make a significant contribution in this area. I believe that more must be done to acknowledge that and to support those organisations to continue the work that they do. Time and again, we have heard evidence that suggests that, without the support of organisations such as Barnardo's, Eighteen and Under, Who Cares? Scotland and many others, victims of child sexual exploitation would not have been able to break free from abuse.

Third sector organisations appear to have an enhanced ability to build trust with young people who as a result become more likely to engage with other support services. We should use the expertise and experience of the third sector to co-ordinate our efforts to tackle child sexual exploitation at a national level.

In that context, a major element is the need to improve the sharing of intelligence about alleged perpetrators between police and the third sector. Third-sector organisations seem to have a distinct advantage in that regard, due to their capacity to gain victims' trust. Good examples of such practice include the partnership between Barnardo's Scotland and police in Renfrewshire, and the multi-agency approach that Glasgow child protection committee has adopted. If we can develop co-ordination with the third sector across the board, it seems likely that we will see significant benefits in outcomes for children and in the identification of offenders and the rate of prosecution.

I am a member of the Public Petitions Committee, and my experience of the inquiry has been both harrowing and rewarding. Although it was very upsetting to hear evidence of young people who have been subjected to sexual exploitation in Scotland, I have been reassured that good work is being done up and down the country to help to protect vulnerable children.

It is clear from our investigation that more needs to be done to co-ordinate the actions of all the agencies that are involved: on data collection,

preventative education, training for people in the care industry, the provision of therapeutic services for young people, and law enforcement. I therefore support the committee's recommendation that the Scottish Government develop a national strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation. If that happens, I am positive that we can improve the services that we provide nationally, to ensure that every child, regardless of where they live in Scotland, has equal access to the support that they need if they are to avoid becoming a victim of child sexual exploitation, as well as the support that they would need to deal with the consequences of becoming a victim.

I again thank everyone who was involved in the committee's inquiry, and I ask members to join me in commending the report to the Scottish Government.

15:21

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I offer my sincere thanks to three separate entities. First, I thank Barnardo's for bringing forward the evidence that lay behind the petition, which resulted in the report that we are debating.

Secondly, I thank Aberlour Child Care Trust and all the other groups that are involved, long term, in dealing with the problem of child sexual exploitation. I mention Aberlour in particular because I, like the member who commented on the matter earlier, regret the decision that was taken in 2013 to withdraw funding for the one refuge in Scotland that might have helped children who have suffered exploitation. I am therefore pleased that the minister said that the situation will be re-examined; I look forward to the outcome of that.

Thirdly, I acknowledge the work of the Public Petitions Committee, which undertook a challenging investigation into a subject that is of great importance to the future of Scotland and our young people. I think that the committee's report deals sensitively with the issues.

Only this morning, I received a telephone call from a constituent who did not know that this debate was to take place today but who has brought to my attention issues that, for the past few months, I have been attempting to deal with—issues that are the result of a period of betrayal that he suffered as a child. He should have been cared for and protected but instead he suffered sexual exploitation. Many decades later, he is still dealing with the pain, regret and isolation that have come from that experience.

I will not go into the detail of my constituent's case, but I think that it mirrors the experience of many children and adults in our community, who must deal with such experiences day in and day

out, often with little chance of escape or with insufficient support.

In that context, I remind members and the minister of the main inquiry objectives: to identify the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Scotland—a matter that we should continue to pay attention to and work on; to identify the most pertinent issues that need to be tackled in a changing scene that needs to be addressed year by year; and to continue to make recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of our services.

Scottish studies are few and far between. The sheer extent and the nature of the subject matter are little known to us, and much is guessed at on the basis of the work and efforts of those engaged in this area of activity. I have no doubt that in her closing speech the minister will acknowledge the need for more research in the area as well as the need to understand clearly the beginnings of exploitation and how it develops in a country such as Scotland.

At a UK level, the child exploitation and online protection centre has engaged in some research, although it is acknowledged to be very limited. However, even that UK-wide study, into which Scottish police forces have fed, acknowledged that nearly 5,500 reports of the exploitation of children were received in 2008-09, with the figure rising a year later to 6,291 reports.

We are perhaps at an advantage, in that CEOP's new head is Johnny Gwynne who, as a former police officer from Scotland, will have an interest in what happens here. I have no doubt that he will be supported by Gordon Meldrum and Bob Lauder, both former members of the Scottish police service, who operate at a high level in the National Crime Agency.

CEOP's report also acknowledges that 27 per cent of girls reported that they had been forced or pressurised to engage in sexual activity against their wishes. That is a real problem for girls in our community that needs to be addressed urgently.

We know who will be in some of the high-risk groups. They come from families who are facing difficulties and where neglect, abuse and domestic violence are part of daily life. They also include those who are in our care system. Unfortunately, we know that children in care systems across the United Kingdom, where the management of the care environment is not disciplined and effective, can be abused, either by their peer group in the care home or occasionally by those who are given the duty of looking after them. We recognise that we need to address that on-going problem. Those who seek to exploit children will also seek out the posts that make that exploitation so much easier. I hope that the minister, in taking the matter

forward, will pay some attention to that element of the problem that we face. Indeed, she has indicated that an action plan or national strategy is vital in progressing the issue.

Not a great deal has been said so far about the internet and the use of chat rooms. Recent reports show that more than 10,000 children in the far east are exploited by adults who live and conduct their business here—

Aileen Campbell: Will the member take an intervention?

Graeme Pearson: I will, if the Presiding Officer is happy for me to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am.

Aileen Campbell: I am sorry for intervening at this stage; I had not quite realised how far into his allotted time the member was.

I point out that, last year, we hosted a summit on the internet to ensure that the momentum that we built up on safe internet use for children and young people continues and that parents are empowered by having knowledge about what their children may face when they use chat rooms and social media sites.

Graeme Pearson: I thank the minister for that intervention and I am happy to acknowledge her point. The use of chat rooms to choreograph the exploitation of children is a new development and indicates how quickly the scene moves. We need to pay attention to that.

Finally, I acknowledge that there is not a lot in the report about prison policy and what we should do with those who reoffend and are in our custody to persuade them to avoid reoffending in the future.

15:29

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Public Petitions Committee since 2008, I found the petition one of the most challenging that I have faced, given the subject matter that we discussed. I thank Barnardo's Scotland for submitting the petition, and I thank the clerks, Dr Sarah Nelson, who acted as the committee's adviser, and all the witnesses who provided both written and oral evidence for consideration. In particular, I thank those young people who provided written evidence on their experiences. Without that evidence, we might have missed a vital element of what we are trying to do, not only as a Parliament but as a society, to address the issues.

Barnardo's Scotland called for new research into the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland. The petition was considered at a time when there was a national

spotlight on high-profile cases, with allegations of child sexual exploitation being investigated. The minister referred to the Savile inquiry, but at the time there were also national press reports of cases in towns and cities in England and elsewhere.

The committee noted that a number of working groups have been established, with researchers commencing work on the issue, but we still felt that it was important for the committee to take on the issue and carry out its own investigation in order to add to the debate and to identify cross-cutting issues without referring the petition on to the Education and Sport Committee, the Justice Committee or whoever else. The committee considered ways in which to fully investigate the issues behind the petition, and we felt that they required a detailed inquiry and a committee report to be presented to the Parliament.

The issue under discussion—child sexual exploitation—is not an easy subject area to address, nor is it straightforward to find a solution to it. Good practice is taking place in Scotland, but it is disjointed and there is a lack of key agencies taking a leadership role. As has been stated, it is not a comfortable subject, but the role of a Parliament and its committees is to highlight wrongdoing and demand action when appropriate, especially if that involves protecting victims.

The availability of data is critical to this difficult subject area, as was noted by the national working group for sexually exploited children and young people when it visited Scotland in October 2013. It reported that estimates gained from agencies showed that the number of young people accessing services could be anything from 64 to 300 annually. It also found much concern about underreporting, and I share that disquiet.

As other members have stated, the committee recommends that

“the Scottish Government should develop a National Strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation”.

Such a strategy must bring together the different departments of Government to tackle the issue in the most appropriate way.

The Scottish Government commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to continue its work of piloting and monitoring its self-evaluation tool with a local authority. The committee’s work in that area highlights the need for some direct action, especially in relation to young people in residential care. We heard that there are intrinsic risks for looked-after children, and evidence that was provided by Who Cares? Scotland highlighted that

“The issue becomes about the young person rather than about the perpetrators who are involved with them.”—*[Official Report, Public Petitions Committee, 11 June 2013; c 1433.]*

That raises issues about the powers that exist to protect young people, which require further clarification particularly with regard to looked-after children and the stigma that is associated with such exploitation. The committee’s recommendation that

“the Care Inspectorate should make CSE a detailed area of inspection for local authorities and all organisations that accommodate children”

is therefore to be welcomed.

Other members referred to the serious issues around protecting vulnerable young people. I have no doubt that the associated media coverage of the sexual abuse and exploitation of young people in recent months has shone a light on the darker parts of society, which are frankly shocking and at times difficult to believe.

The case studies with which Barnardo’s and Eighteen and Under provided the committee detail the serious problems that are associated with looked-after children. The committee’s report highlights the common perception that CSE involves female victims and male perpetrators. The committee is well aware that there are male victims—indeed, the convener mentioned a young male victim of sexual exploitation in his opening speech—but it also noted Professor Stalker’s evidence, which showed that

“boys are disproportionately represented among disabled children and young people who had been abused”—*[Official Report, Public Petitions Committee, 29 October 2013; c 1749.]*

in comparison with their representation among abused young people without disabilities.

I draw the minister’s attention to the committee’s recommendation on reporting where it is identified that young disabled children have been sexually abused. That information is not normally entered in official records, so we are asking that those records be updated and the evidence entered to give a fuller picture of the way in which young disabled children are dealt with.

One of the committee’s key recommendations is

“that development of a national strategy takes account of young men as a particular target group.”

Although we found the evidence difficult to listen to, our experience in no way compares with the suffering that some of our young people in Scotland have to endure daily. More work with front-line voluntary sector organisations is needed, because the evidence from such organisations was compelling, and the work that they do often goes unrecognised by statutory agencies.

I welcome the opportunity to raise awareness of the fact that more must be done to reduce instances of child sexual exploitation, and—more importantly—to bring an end to such exploitation in

Scotland. I welcome the work of the minister and the Scottish Government, but more needs to be done to ensure that we rid society of this crime and that perpetrators are dealt with in the most appropriate manner. I welcome the committee's report.

15:37

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I congratulate David Stewart and his Public Petitions Committee colleagues on their work. The issue of child sexual exploitation is undoubtedly complex, and John Wilson was right on the money in pointing out how uncomfortable the evidence-taking process was for the committee at times. The harrowing and distressing case studies that David Stewart mentioned could not have failed to touch anyone who read them or heard them in person.

I was first made aware of the committee's work in the area through the committee's application to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body for agreement to support an extension to the work of the committee's adviser. That illustrated the complexity of the issues with which the committee was wrestling, and highlighted its determination to do justice to those issues.

I put on record my gratitude to Barnardo's Scotland—that is becoming a bit of a common refrain, not least from me, given my work as a member of the Education and Culture Committee, which has spent at least a couple of years examining issues concerning those who are going through our care system and has more recently been considering the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. I acknowledge that Barnardo's work gave rise to the inquiry on child sexual abuse through its petition and has been instrumental in informing what happens thereafter.

The committee's report and the recommendations that have emerged from the process are welcome and well balanced. The central call for a national overarching strategy strikes me as sensible. I was interested to hear the exchanges between the minister and Jackson Carlaw, as there appears to be a perception of greater disagreement than actually exists.

The minister was right to point to the call from Aberlour Child Care Trust to work with existing work streams, including the short-life ministerial working group, which, as the minister has just confirmed, will be extended to look at the issue. However, given the evidence of a lack of co-ordination, I do not think that we can dismiss the call for a national overarching strategy to pull all the work together.

I was aware of concerns around child sexual exploitation and of the sense that it is on the

increase, with the forms that it takes quickly developing through, for example, online grooming and the opportunities afforded by chat rooms and social media. However, I confess that it is not an area that I felt that I understood in any great detail. I was reassured by Jackson Carlaw's salutary warning about well-intentioned politicians blundering into the area armed with silver bullets, but I was also reassured by the committee's findings, which point out that there is an imperfect understanding of the issues—there is not even agreement on what constitutes child sexual exploitation.

It is therefore absolutely essential to build up understanding and awareness through national data gathering and scoping exercises. However, that awareness and understanding should be built up not just among children, carers, parents and the wider public but among the professionals involved. Again, the point about what appears to be an absence of adequate co-ordination is one that we ought to take cognisance of.

There are of course specific challenges for the police and for justice bodies. The committee found that they appear not to be using current legislation to the fullest extent, not least to give effect to the disruption of perpetrators, which a number of members have mentioned. I ought perhaps to acknowledge the minister's valiant efforts to point to a potential benefit from pulling together a single national police force. Given the extended debate on a topical question earlier this afternoon, that seemed a brave endeavour indeed.

The committee also calls for engagement with children on the issue through education and work in schools. I listened with interest to what Jackson Carlaw said in that respect, but I believe that it is absolutely right to do such work. Apparently consensual relationships are often anything but, and there is a lack of understanding of the signs of grooming among not only children who are being groomed but teachers and parents.

The way in which such education work is undertaken is critically important. I have long had concerns about the unintended consequences that can flow from campaigns around stranger danger. The committee heard evidence that a lot of child sexual exploitation happens within families and care settings, so it would be wrong to overstress the extent to which those unknown to individuals should be the focus of attention. There is a need to build confidence in children so that they recognise and can deal with the problems or know who to approach to help them deal with problems. There is also a need to build resilience in individual children—David Stewart alluded to that. However, there is a risk that we will cultivate an atmosphere of fear and suspicion that could

ultimately be counterproductive in meeting the objectives that we are all intent on meeting.

I will refer briefly to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. The minister has obviously been intimately involved with the bill process, and she was right to point to some of the improvements that will be delivered through the passing of that legislation next month. However, I am conscious that Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, the together coalition and other bodies have pointed to the bill's deficiencies in terms of the rights of children and, in particular, the failure to include in the bill articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That represents a missed opportunity. For those less familiar with the UNCRC, I point out that article 3 is about ensuring that the voice of the child is heard in all decisions that affect him or her, and article 12 says that the best interests of the child should be treated as the paramount consideration. Although very valuable steps are being taken through the bill, the failure to incorporate more fully those articles is a deficiency. I think that the Public Petitions Committee's report simply reinforces that point.

The committee's report is by no means a magic bullet for addressing an issue that is complex and pernicious and whose nature is evolving. On that basis, I again congratulate the Public Petitions Committee on not being put off by the scale of the task that it undertook, on grappling with the issue and on coming forward with what I think are sensible recommendations. I certainly look forward to hearing the minister's closing speech, but I think that we have the basis on which to address some of the shortcomings that the committee identified.

15:45

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I hope that Parliament will bear with me as I speak with a heavy cold, but also with a heavy heart as we debate this horrendous subject. Child sexual exploitation is a blight on our society, and on societies throughout Europe and around the world. In an ideal world, this debate would not be required, because we would not have to worry about child sexual exploitation and society would not have to contend with issues such as systematic and complex sexual abuse, sexual abuse within the home, child trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, grooming or forced marriage. However, we are where we are, and sadly our society still has to contend with the issue. Child sexual exploitation covers an extremely broad range of issues, and a large number of agencies and organisations are engaged in efforts to tackle and prevent it. It is

generally recognised that it is—sadly—a growing problem.

I was not a member of the Public Petitions Committee when Barnardo's lodged the petition in July 2011, but I joined the committee in time to take part in the visit to Barnardo's facility in Glasgow in September 2012, following which the committee agreed to hold an inquiry into the issue. I was pleased to see at first hand the work that goes on at Barnardo's in Glasgow, and I am pleased to hear reports that it has growing positive relations with the local police and is now something of a model of best practice.

We know that there is good practice in Scotland, but it is patchy and unco-ordinated. It is recognised that child protection committees are best placed to collect and map data in their areas, and where good practice is found the information should be shared and, where possible, rolled out in other areas.

At this point, I add my thanks to Barnardo's for highlighting its concerns to us through the Public Petitions Committee. I also thank the committee clerks, the Scottish Parliament information centre and the committee's adviser, Dr Sarah Nelson, for all their hard work during the inquiry. Their assistance was invaluable, as was that of the agencies and organisations that gave evidence.

We heard some harrowing and shocking evidence during the lengthy inquiry, and I for one hope that the outcome will be a stronger focus by all agencies on tackling and preventing child sexual exploitation with the aim of totally eradicating this blight on our society. There is no quick fix, of course, and our inquiry was certainly not tasked with coming up with all the answers. Indeed, as it progressed it became clearer that the issue was a complex and continually evolving one, especially with the emergence of concerns about online activities, about which we have already heard this afternoon.

However, we came up with a large number of salient recommendations, one of which is worth highlighting:

"The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and all key agencies adopt a high commitment to disrupting perpetrator activity and identifying those at risk."

Associated with that, the committee's report states:

"The Committee recommends mandatory training for frontline and specialist police officers on legislative options to disrupt perpetrators. The Committee also recommends better police analysis and collation of information about and the tracking of abusive networks."

Dealing with the monsters who are at the heart of the problem and disrupting their operation will go some way towards reducing the figures for CSE

crimes. We heard from Daljeet Dagon from Barnardo's that, in order to reduce child sexual exploitation effectively and to protect current and potential victims, it is necessary to take resolute action against the perpetrators of these crimes. When she addressed the committee, she spoke about what she called the triangle approach that Barnardo's has developed,

"whereby the focus is on the victim but there is also recognition that there is a child sex offender and a facilitator."

She went on to say:

"We have to flip the triangle over and focus on disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators, and we should identify locations and police them better, so that we protect young people and prevent them from becoming involved in child sexual exploitation."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 11 June 2013; c 1434.]

However, the report also notes that one of the difficulties in disrupting perpetrators is the attitudes of young people and those who witness CSE. Initiatives that are designed to challenge those attitudes face difficulties, not merely because perpetrators are skilled in operating under the radar, but because in such crimes young people often do not see themselves as victims, as we heard from a number of witnesses. Waiting for young people to complain could be an ineffective strategy for catching offenders, since victims often protect perpetrators—who initially treat victims as special and might offer them alcohol, drugs, money and affection—because of misplaced loyalty, fear or intimidation.

Underuse of legislation does not help. The Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 created a specific offence of child grooming and provided for an application to the court for a risk of sexual harm order when an individual is suspected of involvement in a course of conduct to groom a child. However, the committee heard that there is disquiet among practitioners about the fact that the 2005 act is not well known among, or well used by, the police.

Children 1st expressed disquiet about low usage rates of existing legislation. It called in evidence for the police to have additional mandatory training that would highlight the legislative options that are available to disrupt and prosecute CSE offenders. That view was echoed by Police Scotland. I am pleased that the minister endorsed that earlier.

Barnardo's called for the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill to include tackling CSE and for joint work with the police to disrupt perpetrator activity as part of the proposals for children's services plans. I urge the minister to consider taking on board that request as the bill progresses through Parliament.

Parliament will fail the people of Scotland if the hidden problem of CSE is not properly tackled with a clear strategy. If our committee's report and resultant action by the Government and associated agencies help just one child to avoid the effects of CSE, that will be a job well done, but we should not stop until the nightmare has been eradicated.

15:52

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I thank the committee for its work and Barnardo's for its petition. David Stewart was right to talk about

"the dark corners of Scotland".

None of us doubts how difficult and harrowing the subject must have been for the committee to deal with, but it could have considered no more important a subject. It would have been wrong to duck the issue just because it is difficult. The committee is to be commended for taking the issue forward and for bringing the debate to the chamber.

As a father and a human being, I find incredible the physical and mental damage that some people inflict on children and young people. Jackson Carlaw referred to the

"dark side of human behaviour",

which is the least that we could describe the activities as. The young people who are affected deserve our protection and they deserve to live happy childhoods. It is always depressing beyond expression when we hear of those who have been exploited.

Recent revelations in the media have probably brought the issue to the fore, but it has—sadly—long been with us. David Stewart mentioned the depressing case studies that are set out in the report. They represent different stories and experiences, but all of them provide a litany of testimony to the fact that child sexual exploitation is a real and present danger in Scotland.

The questions for us, as a Parliament, are how we support those who have been affected, and how we will tackle the incidence of child exploitation in the future. The report is an important part of that consideration and I welcome it in that context. The committee made a number of recommendations, each of which is commendable in its own way. I might touch on some of them.

I do not think that the Scottish Government has responded to the report yet, so I look forward to seeing its response. However, it is clear that the Government has taken action to tackle child exploitation—for example, the minister referred to the ministerial short-life working group.

That brings me to one of the committee's recommendations, which was to review the national strategy. I know that the working group has essentially undertaken work that has laid out a series of actions that will have to be taken to strengthen how we address child sexual exploitation. That seems to be similar to work that the committee has requested, and the point has been well made about action being taken rather than having another review.

Indeed the Scottish Government has taken other action, including the summit on internet safety, funding for respectme and ChildLine, and issuing advice to schools to encourage safe and responsible use of mobile phone technology in schools. We can see that the Scottish Government has undertaken a range of measures to tackle what is a pernicious social ill.

I note that one of the things that the petition called for was research into the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation. Of course, we have heard that the Government has commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to look at that work and the work that is being done in the Forth valley pilot to which the minister referred. Again, we can see the Government responding to the petition.

In saying that, we should recognise the difficulties that will always exist for us in establishing the prevalence of child sexual exploitation. The victims are understandably reluctant to come forward because they are concerned about not being believed, or they face intimidation, and there is often misplaced shame. The victims are not the people who should feel ashamed, but shame is often an issue, as was reflected in the case studies. There are difficulties in establishing the exact scale of the problem, but I agree that we should try to quantify it and I would welcome any efforts to do so.

However, I consider that it is rather more important to tackle the problem than it is to quantify it. After all, if one child is being exploited, that is too high a prevalence for our society to bear.

How we tackle the problem must be informed by involvement in the area. I agreed with Jackson Carlaw's point, although I might paraphrase it slightly differently: we need to caution against the political class being seen to do something just because something needs to be done. We need to ensure the efficacy of any measures that we take.

In that regard, I will highlight a few concerns that have been raised by outside groups in briefings that have been provided ahead of today's debate. The first is in education, which was picked up on by the committee. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Liam McArthur made the point about placing the work within the

context of children's rights, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 29 is the right to education; the commissioner pointed out that

"Recent research with young people in Scotland revealed worrying attitudes to sexual health and consent ... and the sexual objectification of girls and young women highlight the need to tackle such attitudes."

The commissioner suggests that:

"The Scottish Government's forthcoming update of its guidance on Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHPPE) provides one important opportunity"

to deal with education around these issues. Barnardo's Scotland made the same point, as did Aberlour Child Care Trust. It would be interesting to hear the Scottish Government's perspective on those views and how we can better educate our young people to be safe.

We also need to reflect the fact that the problem manifests itself in different ways in different places, and the role of child protection committees must also be viewed as important. In its briefing, Barnardo's talks about how data can be shared better between child protection committees. That strikes me as an important point to make, so it would be useful to know how the Scottish Government is facilitating such information sharing.

I will close by talking about the role of parents in responding to concerns about child sexual exploitation. As a father, I consider that it is my responsibility to ensure, along with my wife, that my two children are aware of the dangers that exist. I do not want them to be overawed or weighed down by them, but to be aware. As parents, we aim to ensure that our young children grow up to have respect for themselves and respect for others. We do our best to bring them up in an environment that nourishes and cherishes. The role of the parent is an important part of the challenge in tackling child sexual exploitation. We know that, despite the best efforts of parents, young people sometimes get drawn into circumstances that we do not want them to get into.

We know that there are parents who are neglectful. Even further beyond my comprehension is that sometimes parents themselves are the perpetrators of that exploitation. It is right, therefore, that we have a strategy to try to deal with child sexual exploitation. I commend the Public Petitions Committee in that regard. I hope that when we return to this subject, we will see further progress on tackling the exploitation of Scotland's young people.

16:00

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. We often say that debates are important, but I cannot think of many debates that are more important than one on how we protect our children from harm and from sexual exploitation.

I thank Dave Stewart and the other Public Petitions Committee members for their inquiry. I know that they have spent a great deal of time investigating the causes of child exploitation and investigating the actions that governments national and local, and all relevant authorities need to take to prevent children from being sexually exploited. I also thank Barnardo's for lodging its important petition in the first place.

I was a member of the Public Petitions Committee from May to December 2011 and remember when the petition was first lodged; it is clear that the inquiry was a lengthy piece of work by the committee. We all need to recognise that the issue probably deserves more prominence than it has been given in the past. I am not saying that any of us, or that any organisation, does not think that it is an important issue, and I welcome the actions that the minister has set out on behalf of the Scottish Government. However, I think that it is fair to say that the issue has not until now had the prominence that it requires, which is why the Barnardo's petition and the work of the Public Petitions Committee have been so important.

As Dave Stewart outlined, the committee report proposes a national strategy and action plan. My Labour colleagues and I whole-heartedly agree with that proposal and we expect it to be progressed as a matter of urgency. As the minister quite rightly said, a time-consuming review is not a necessity. Where there is agreement on recommendations, we would like to see those recommendations being progressed as soon as possible.

As many members have said, to tackle child sexual exploitation effectively, we must look at the extent of the problem and that means compiling and tracking statistics. When the petition first arrived at the committee, I was concerned about the issues that were raised by children's charities including Barnardo's about the lack of information on the number of cases of exploitation held by the authorities.

I understand that there is currently no estimate of the prevalence of child sexual exploitation in Scotland; although studies have taken place, they have been on a small scale. We should look at statistics with caution because we are, of course, talking about children, and not statistics, but we cannot address the problem properly if it is not properly understood.

I welcome the work that has been done to date and the research that has been commissioned by the Scottish Government, but we need more comprehensive research and more comprehensive data collection if we are to fully understand the extent to which such exploitation is prevalent in Scotland and what needs to be done to tackle it.

The Barnardo's briefing that members received in advance of the debate supports a number of the report's recommendations and highlights the importance of engaging with children through education and work in schools. I know that the committee report makes a series of recommendations around that and I echo calls from around the chamber for those recommendations to be progressed and for greater engagement with children and young people.

We are right to acknowledge the importance of effective education programmes in helping young people to recognise and report incidents of sexual abuse. Children need to know the signs of sexual exploitation, how to raise the alarm and where they can ask for help and get the support that they need. The NSPCC's talk PANTS campaign is an example of such a programme.

As Graeme Pearson said, of course we must look at how to prevent cases from arising, but we must also better support survivors—children and adults who suffered exploitation as children. I know that the Public Petitions Committee is also currently considering petition PE1351—entitled "Time for All to be Heard"—which is about victims of institutional abuse. A number of adults across the country continue to suffer the effects of having been abused and exploited as children. I know from speaking to constituents that more needs to be done to support many survivors. I hope that the Scottish Government will work with the Public Petitions Committee and the cross-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse on that petition.

On supporting survivors, as David Torrance said, we all agree that we need safe places for children who experience sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse to go to when it is not appropriate for them to return to their family home. Therefore, like many members, I was deeply concerned to learn that the only dedicated young persons refuge, which was run by Aberlour Child Care Trust, was forced to close at the end of June last year because of a funding shortfall. Provision of refuges should be a priority for the Scottish Government, so I welcome the minister's comments about the ministerial working group and her commitment to look again at how we support victims of child exploitation and abuse. I ask her to update Parliament and other parties on that and

on how the Government will support vital support services like the Aberlour facility.

I take the opportunity to praise some of the organisations that work tirelessly to protect children from abuse and exploitation. I have mentioned Barnardo's and Aberlour, and members have mentioned a number of other key organisations, but I particularly thank the Internet Watch Foundation, which does invaluable work in preventing sexual abuse images of children from being published on the internet—an issue that several members raised. The foundation works with the police and internet service providers to track down individuals and rings of individuals who abuse and exploit children, as well as those who share the images.

On that point, this year's safer internet day takes place on 11 February. The day, which in the UK is organised by the UK safer internet centre, promotes safe and responsible use of online technology and mobile phones by children and young people. I encourage members and the Scottish Government to do what they can to help to raise awareness of safer internet day and the work of the Internet Watch Foundation.

As I said, the issue is clearly a serious one and many members have made a number of points about it. Effectively tackling child sexual exploitation requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response. It is essential that all services and individual practitioners take responsibility. I welcome the committee's proposal for a national strategy and action plan, and many of the committee's other recommendations. I again thank all the organisations that are working flat out to reduce and prevent child sexual exploitation. We should send out the message from across the chamber that we continue to support them fully in their work. Our children deserve no less.

16:07

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I, too, thank the committee for the difficult work that it undertook in its inquiry. As the convener, Dave Stewart, and Angus MacDonald said, if one child is helped because of the inquiry, we have surely done something. As almost every member who has spoken has said, the subject is a difficult one. John Wilson talked about how challenging the inquiry was for the committee. To see that, members need only look at the case studies in annex A of the report and read about the young people who were involved. That is not just print on paper—we can see that they are real young people whose real lives and real issues are happening in the world. It is harrowing, horrific and difficult reading for us all but, as the convener rightly said—this might be paraphrasing—we need to know these things and investigate the issues,

because the exploitation cannot be allowed to continue.

Jamie Hepburn said that, as a father, it is difficult to comprehend the situation. I agree, because child sexual exploitation repulses us all when we hear about it. That is why the work that the committee undertook was so difficult. Jamie Hepburn also mentioned that parents have a responsibility. We must ensure that we know what our role is with our children and how we can help. Although the education system plays an important part, we all have a responsibility on that.

The minister said that we all felt
“a mixture of horror, anger and sadness”

at the news from Rotherham and Rochdale and at the on-going Jimmy Savile stories. It is extremely difficult for us to comprehend, especially in the high-profile Jimmy Savile case, how people can be such vile individuals.

I welcome the Scottish Government's ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation, which involves experts and those in local authorities, the Crown Office, the police and key children's organisations who work closely with victims of exploitation. The group is the best way to share best practice—as Angus MacDonald said, there is quite a bit of good practice out there—and ensure that organisations work together.

David Torrance mentioned data collection, which is an important part of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. We have received evidence on the difficulty of being able to get information backwards and forwards. One of the key points of the bill is that we will get that opportunity to share information through the named person.

David Torrance also mentioned the vulnerable young people operational group in Renfrewshire. It has representatives from the police, social work, education, health and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration on a case-by-case basis, meets regularly and gives people the opportunity to get information about CSE. It is an example of best practice and is mentioned on page 13 of the report.

The working group is correct to say that child sexual exploitation is not a stand-alone issue. We need to ensure that we all know what is going on and that we do all that we can to work together. We need to ensure that we have the strongest approach on child protection.

One thing that I need not mention, because it has been mentioned on numerous occasions, is that the central pillar of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill is the getting it right for every child approach. That is one of the main

reasons why the bill is going through the parliamentary process.

The policy of giving young people access to a named person until they are 18 will make a difference, help with some of the cases mentioned in the report and highlight issues. We cannot legislate for bad people, as I have said before, but when child sexual exploitation cases happen, we can try to ensure that everyone gets all the information that they possibly can to give the young people help and support and, potentially, to identify the problem. The child's plan and access to it will also make a difference and help.

Schools play a vital role in identifying and preventing child sexual exploitation by ensuring that, as the minister stated, children and young people are educated about topics such as appropriate relationships, protection from abuse and keeping themselves safe from harm from early on in their education right until they leave school.

The Government already invests in some programmes. The respectme service and ChildLine are Government funded and are working hard with others to help people to tackle bullying in all forms and to give advice to schools on how to encourage safe, responsible use of personal mobile technology in school and beyond. One of the main issues that came up in the report is the fact that we have an issue with cyber-bullying and bullying in general among young people.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to ensure that fast, effective protection is in place for children who are at risk of abuse and neglect. It has already set up the ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation. The group has reported back and I wait to hear what the Government says on that report and what further it will do in light of the committee's report.

One of the messages that has been highlighted is that child protection is everyone's responsibility. I mentioned that earlier. We all have to take responsibility and ensure that we talk about the matter openly. Many of us will have had difficulty when we saw the subject of the debate but, if we do not talk about it, who will talk about it and how can we ensure that horror stories like those in the report do not happen?

We must remember that the case studies in the report are not just part of the report to be filed away and forgotten about; they are the lives of young people. We must ensure that what we do in the Parliament makes a difference in their lives.

16:13

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am especially pleased to participate in the debate, as I am a member of the Public Petitions Committee that produced the report on tackling child sexual exploitation.

As fellow members of the committee are well aware, it took more than 10 months of evidence taking to produce the report, the origins of which can be traced away back to July 2011, when the committee received a petition from Barnardo's Scotland calling for new research into the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland and new Scottish Government guidelines to combat that problem.

On hearing initial and preliminary evidence— together with evidence from the Minister for Children and Young People, Aileen Campbell— members of the committee all felt that it was essential that an inquiry into the issues surrounding child sexual exploitation be undertaken.

At the onset of the inquiry, committee members became aware that a number of other agencies had initiated working groups to investigate child sexual exploitation. It was important that we did not duplicate that work or overlap that activity but instead complemented and enhanced each investigation by setting clear terms, which we did. That enabled us to come up with 28 recommendations.

Having set the scene, I will turn my attention to the findings of the committee with regard to tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland. In particular, I will focus on three areas in the report: the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Scotland, the vulnerabilities of young people, and the socialisation of young people with special regard to early intervention.

On the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in Scotland, the committee found that, although the current definition of child sexual exploitation was deemed to be helpful by individuals and agencies and was seen as particularly important with regard to raising awareness and understanding of the issue, there were some reservations about it. The committee made a number of recommendations in that regard, which included the Scottish Government giving high priority to ensuring that high-quality data collection tools that would supply vital information on the prevalence and nature of CSE in Scotland could be identified, standardised, and rolled out across Scotland. Such an approach would provide information that is necessary to inform a co-ordinated strategy for tackling and preventing child sexual exploitation and supporting victims. We would not need to start from scratch:

the committee heard from Sheila Taylor MBE and Cheryl Stevens of the national working group for sexually exploited children and young people, and from the Forth valley child protection committee pilot study, both of which groups have existing data collection tools.

On the issue of the vulnerabilities of young people, it would be true to say that all children and young people are vulnerable to some extent, no matter how well they are nurtured and supported by their family and schools. However, within Scottish society, there is a group of children and young people who are particularly vulnerable: those who are in the care system. As a consequence, it is of particular importance that the committee's recommendations with regard to children and young people in the care system are taken forward as a high priority.

On the issue of socialisation, as a mother of three children—two of whom are teenagers and the third of whom is in primary school—I cannot emphasise enough the vital role that education programmes can play in making children aware of the dangers and pitfalls that exist, especially in this era of instant global communication. As other members have noted, the use and misuse of social networking is a hugely worrying concern and is an issue that should be tackled. That is why there is a need for the Scottish Government to address the committee's recommendations around the socialisation of young people and early intervention.

I wish to draw the chamber's attention to the vital role that education in its broadest sense—I include training in this regard—can play in tackling and preventing child sexual exploitation and supporting the victims.

I cannot overstate the importance of the committee's overarching recommendation, which is that the Scottish Government should develop a national strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation. Such a national strategy would provide a framework for a co-ordinated national approach, which would have a tripartite goal of tackling CSE, preventing CSE and supporting victims of CSE. Only by having such an approach can the issues that I highlighted be addressed, which would enable us to create a society that has at its core the wellbeing of its children and young people and the aim of protecting them from the scourge of child sexual exploitation.

16:20

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I thank my colleagues who sit on the Public Petitions Committee for their dedication in bringing this important issue to the chamber. I echo Liam McArthur's comments: my experience on

Education and Culture Committee inquiries informs me that this would have been a hard, uncomfortable and at times harrowing experience for Public Petitions Committee members. I for one am grateful for their efforts during the inquiry and for their speeches this afternoon.

That is, of course, as nothing compared with the experience of front-line workers, including those at Barnardo's and in the various third sector organisations that work in this area, or with that of the people who contributed to the report with reference to their personal experiences. I thank them for their bravery and candour. I believe that everyone in the chamber holds the wellbeing and safety of our young people foremost in their minds in debating the committee report this afternoon.

Just yesterday, in the live online edition of the Newcastle *Chronicle*, there was an article about this very issue. The headline was "West End community's shock at child sex exploitation allegations". The report says:

"People living in Newcastle's West End yesterday told of their horror after learning that a number of their neighbours had been arrested by police probing a conspiracy to rape young women and teenage girls."

That was done under operation sanctuary. The article goes on to say:

"Today some shocked residents of the West End have told of their disgust at what could have been going on behind closed doors in their community."

The article contains many contributions from local people, but I highlight in particular that of Dr Hari Shukla, a former director of the Tyne & Wear Racial Equality Council, who spoke of his upset that a group of that size had supposedly targeted its criminal activity at young women. The article says:

"Dr Shukla is a member of the Newcastle Safeguarding Initiative, founded 10 years ago to make sure schools, young people and families in the city were working together to protect children in the community.

He said: 'We are upset by it and an alleged crime like this is not acceptable. It's just wrong and I'm certain that all the communities involved feel the same way.'"

The shock and horror experienced by that community, and its reaction, are recognisable and understandable. It brings home to us all the fact that that type of child sexual exploitation can be happening. It is incumbent on us all—on all Scotland's communities—to be aware and vigilant in this regard.

I welcome the comments that the Minister for Children and Young People made when she announced the expert group on tackling child sexual exploitation:

"Sexual exploitation of children is a reality here in Scotland. Anyone who thinks our nation is immune from this appalling crime is simply wrong. It is a problem we face

and a problem we must face up to. Research we published last year makes clear that there is no reason to believe that Scotland is any different from other countries in this. Our aim, therefore, must be to ensure that child sexual exploitation in Scotland can be detected, dealt with and ultimately prevented."

I welcome the Public Petitions Committee's report. As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I am aware that much of the work that was undertaken for the report sits alongside our deliberations on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which will shortly come before the chamber at stage 3.

One area that has proved to be controversial, and which, to my mind, has received a disproportionate amount of attention, is the bill's proposal for a named person. I note that the Public Petitions Committee's recommendations include a request for a named person to support victims of CSE through the justice process.

Other evidence, which we have also heard about in the chamber today, about the vulnerability of any young person online, using social media or in chatrooms, and about the risks that young people face in other social settings, has confirmed my conviction that the role of a named person, who is an appropriate professional for a young person, whatever their circumstance—be it in the justice system, in the children's hearings system, in social work or involving additional support needs—is a very important one. As Dave Stewart said, if one child can be saved by the work that the Public Petitions Committee has done, it will have been worth it. I feel the same way about the named person provisions being enshrined in the bill. If there is one less headline about a tragedy involving just one person, it will have been worth the effort of putting that provision in place.

I hope that those who are opposed to the named person provisions will reflect on the report, and indeed on this afternoon's debate, as the measure is supported by children's charities, including Barnardo's, which brought its petition to the Public Petitions Committee. The Aberlour Child Care Trust also provided briefings for this afternoon.

Liam McArthur: I am very grateful to Clare Adamson for taking an intervention. She will know that I support the principle of the named person, but one of the concerns that those of us who are willing to support the principle have had is around the diversion of resources away from areas of specific welfare need, given the wider definition of wellbeing. Does she not recognise that those concerns still exist and that we need to be vigilant to ensure that attention is focused on areas where concerns around welfare are particularly pronounced?

Clare Adamson: I absolutely understand the concerns that have been raised on this issue, but I think the evidence that we took in committee shows that the use of a named person will be measured and appropriate to the particular child. Most children will have no need of a named person, but the fact that that provision is normalised within a universal service means that there will be an opportunity for any child from any background who could be in need to contact someone if they want to do so. That is an important reason why the named person should be included in the bill and it reflects the Public Petitions Committee's work in this area.

I also sit on the European and External Relations Committee. Last year we took evidence from Myria Vasiliadou, the European anti-trafficking commissioner. The work that is being done on trafficking in Europe is very important. She told our committee:

"we look at trafficking in human beings as being fundamentally a human rights violation that is a serious form of organised crime. I want to clarify how we understand trafficking human rights. Of course there is a legal framework and legal definition. However, to put it simply, it is about people who live under appalling conditions and work for or provide services to others against their will, with absolutely no choice to escape; whose lives are often in danger and whose families are threatened; and who often disappear."

She went on to say:

"There are hundreds of thousands of people in Europe today who are trafficked. Our data suggests that 62 per cent of those who have been identified are women and girls who are trafficked for sexual exploitation."—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 12 September 2013; c 1311-12 and 1313.]

Scotland does not stand alone in tackling this issue. We could look to the directive on human trafficking to see how we might tackle these issues and how the UK might tackle demand.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches. I call Liz Smith, who has up to seven minutes.

16:27

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In her capacity as chair of the ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation, Jackie Brock of Children in Scotland described the issue as "particularly complex". She is right—and for exactly the reasons that were set out by the convener of the Public Petitions Committee in his opening remarks. As other members have said, not only are there few subjects quite as distressing as this, but few are quite so hard to tackle, given the difficulties in uncovering the true extent of the problem.

Several members quite rightly highlighted that, thanks to the researchers from the University of Bedfordshire, we know that the extent of child sexual exploitation is extremely difficult to establish. They state that the problem “is not visible” and it has as much to do with the entirely understandable reluctance of the victims to come forward as it has to do with the hidden nature of the crimes and those who perpetrate them.

We know, too, from the very high-profile cases that there have been in Rochdale and Oxford just how sensitive this subject is within the public mood. That point was extremely well put by Jamie Hepburn and John Wilson, and by Graeme Pearson, who made a very thoughtful contribution. Given his experience in the police service, he brings a greater degree of understanding to this issue than perhaps the rest of us do.

All this matters because the problem can be addressed fully only if we understand its nature, prevalence and extent. We have a definition of child sexual exploitation in Scotland, but, as Anne McTaggart rightly said, there have been issues around it. The line between such crimes and other forms of abuse can be extremely thin. In truth, there is often a cyclical relationship between the two, which can add even more complexity.

As Jayne Baxter rightly said in her contribution, the study that was conducted by CELCIS into the sexual exploitation of looked-after children provided particularly important evidence, not least because it threw up the fact that those who are in that circumstance are particularly vulnerable, because they are often in the care system for the very reason that they have been abused or exploited.

Martin Henry of Stop It Now! Scotland has warned that

“it would be dangerous to separate child sexual exploitation too much from the wider childhood sexual abuse agenda.”—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 11 June 2013; c 1434.]

We have to take that comment seriously, although it adds that greater degree of complexity.

Given that, it is easy to appreciate where the ministerial working group was coming from. The problem is very real, but quite often unseen; it is distinct, but closely related to other crimes. As Jackson Carlaw said in another thought-provoking speech, the problem throws up a lot of the dilemmas that we face as parliamentarians. Notwithstanding that, the steps that have been taken are very much in the right direction and the Public Petitions Committee’s report is hugely helpful, as are the deliberations of many in the voluntary sector, including the ever-helpful Barnardo’s. The Scottish Government and the ministerial working group have shown a real

determination to address the issue head on and improve Scotland’s national child protection guidance. We have seen in both the drugs debate and the alcohol debate that we have to be bold and, in some cases, go into areas that perhaps would not always be the choosing of parliamentarians.

I did not sit through the committee’s deliberations first hand, but for me the committee report sends out some key messages. I will deal with a few of them. First, in this age of rapid online communication, more and more youngsters—even those from secure backgrounds—are in danger of falling victim to sexual exploitation, and clearly some groups are particularly vulnerable. Gil Paterson made a good point about where the responsibility for that lies. The area needs urgent attention and I do not pretend that I have any answers, but it is coming up the political agenda.

A second point, which was raised several times in the report, is the need to identify and help victims as quickly and efficiently as possible. We have seen lots of initiatives that have made that more possible, and I take on board the point that several members made about trying to draw that together into a coherent strategy. I fully accept what the minister is saying about the fact that we do not want another war of words or another review—it has to be about action.

However, we have some good experience on which to base our future policy. In February 2013, operation dash investigated CSE in the 12 local authorities of the then Strathclyde Police area and worked closely with Barnardo’s policy areas. It was helpful to identify the four categories that help to inform us about the responses. We have seen interesting responses in Derby and Keighley in the south, which have also informed policy.

I share Neil Bibby’s and David Stewart’s concerns about the Aberlour situation in Glasgow. I am certain that Aberlour is keen to work with the Scottish Government to address the situation. The opportunity to have safe places means so much to children who need help and who need a situation in which they can feel totally secure. I hope that the minister will take up Aberlour’s offer.

My colleague Jackson Carlaw set out a third important issue of training and education, and argued that we should not forget parenting. We all have a responsibility to ensure that the information on which we drive forward policy is accurate and can be used coherently.

The debate has been very interesting and helpful, and I thank the Public Petitions Committee for its work.

16:34

Jayne Baxter: I listened to the debate with great interest. It is fair to say that this is not the easiest topic to hear about, think about or deal with—as George Adam said, the subject brings feelings of revulsion—but it is important that elected representatives take the topic on and take steps to move it forward. The subject is too important for us not to do that, for the victims of child sexual exploitation and for the agencies in the public and voluntary sector who work hard to reach out to and support victims. Members of the Scottish Parliament have a responsibility to bring to bear all our influence and resources in making improvements in relation to the area.

As is often the case in debates in this Parliament about issues that affect children and young people, the need to listen to young people themselves came through very strongly. The committee used the evidence that it gathered and feedback from young people to build a strong set of recommendations. We took an in-depth approach, working with service providers, service users and other agencies, whose input had a profound influence on our work and on today's debate.

Part 4 of our report focused on support, education and training. It is clear that support can be provided only when young people trust the agencies and organisations that set out to help them. Confidentiality is key, and the role of third sector agencies is vital in delivering essential support services for young people. David Torrance, in a thoughtful speech, talked about the third sector's role in engaging with young people. The third sector is often where young people are at—to use the modern terminology—and it can use its engagement in all sorts of circumstances to build a relationship in which a child can talk about sexual exploitation. Given that relationship, the third sector is uniquely placed to be able to introduce preventative education and awareness raising for young people and their parents and families. It can also offer emotional support. The third sector has a powerful role in taking such matters forward.

The committee convener's two case studies showed the importance of awareness raising among the public and support for vulnerable young people. Neil Bibby and Graeme Pearson talked about their work to support vulnerable constituents and about the need to train staff who work with young people. The third sector is well placed to share its experience and work with the public sector to build a skills base.

Many members picked up on the closure in 2013 of the only refuge for young people, which is mentioned in our report. Aberlour, which ran the service, said that a problem with its sustainability

was the poor rate of referrals to it. Of course, we cannot get people to come to a refuge by saying, "We're open for business; here's the refuge service for runaways." Young people will not respond to that; we need to be much more sensitive, diplomatic and clever in how we engage with them.

Aberlour says that every five minutes a young person in the United Kingdom runs away from home, often because of neglect or harm, so it is worrying that a low referral rate contributed to the refuge's closure. A number of factors need to be considered in relation to Aberlour's decision, so I was pleased to hear the minister agree that we need a better understanding of what services can be provided to help young people.

Many members, including David Torrance and John Wilson, talked about variations in service provision and data collection across the country. Scottish Labour, in the context of its support for the committee's recommendation that there be an overarching national strategy, is keen for further research and improved data collection to be done in Scotland. As Neil Bibby said, we are dealing with children, not statistics, but we must gather data if we are to understand the scale of the challenge and the prevalence of child sexual exploitation, for example in remote and rural areas, as we said in the report.

We are keen for more work on the pursuit of child sexual exploitation as an offence. The child sexual exploitation short-life ministerial working group reported:

"The Group ... was generally satisfied that there were no significant gaps in the overall scope of the criminal law to pursue CSE as an offence."

However, Liam McArthur talked about our need to achieve a better understanding of child sexual exploitation. Many members have mentioned the increasing need to do that because the internet and social media play such an important role in the world in which we live and the lives of many young people. Indeed, I see how immersed members of my family and the young people who I know are in the internet. If we are to understand the issue and define what child sexual exploitation is, we must look at the role that the internet plays in that regard. Perhaps we could also take that role on board when defining what should be an offence.

Evidence given to the committee criticised the use of existing powers. The report notes—members have picked up on this—the committee's continued dissatisfaction with the responses of Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Lord Advocate to the concerns raised about the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act

2005. It is clear that post-legislative scrutiny of the 2005 act is required.

Angus MacDonald mentioned the need for training and support for police officers, as well as the need to react strongly and prosecute perpetrators, which is an issue that must be picked up through legislation. John Wilson spoke about the Care Inspectorate's role.

The Presiding Officer: I ask the member to bring her remarks to a close.

Jayne Baxter: Okay. Members will be aware of Jenny Marra's proposed human trafficking bill. I understand that the Government is looking into how that can be taken forward. I was pleased to hear Clare Adamson pick up on that topic, too.

The committee report was clear that it did not want to rip up the rule book and start again, but instead that it wanted to build on the work undertaken to tackle the problem of child sexual exploitation and to fill in the gaps in policy and practice. Scottish Labour reiterates its support for the committee's recommendations and, in particular, the creation and implementation of a national strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation.

16:41

Aileen Campbell: We have heard some powerful speeches in a very constructive debate and I thank the members for their positive contributions. A number of valuable points have been raised and there is agreement that child sexual exploitation is an issue that needs to be tackled, as Clare Adamson and many other members have stated.

There should be absolutely no complacency about child sexual exploitation. Indeed, that is recognised in our 2010 child protection guidance, which has been revised to cover key areas of child sexual exploitation, including online grooming and child trafficking. We had already decided to refresh our national guidance further, but I thank the committee for its work and contributions on the issue.

Members have raised a number of points and I hope to cover most of those mentioned. David Stewart spoke about the need to have a better definition of child sexual exploitation to aid understanding of what that is. Liam McArthur and others also made that point. We have worked with Barnardo's to update the definition. That will feature in the new section on child sexual exploitation, which will be published in the coming months in the newly refreshed national child protection guidance. I hope that that gives some comfort to those who have sought that better and much more widely understood definition.

Another theme was the need for a new national strategy. As I said in my opening speech, we need action. However, I am glad that Jackson Carlaw shares my concerns that a further review could risk delaying action to tackle what is a pernicious, vile but also highly complex crime.

Barnardo's briefing states that a national action plan would set out the actions that we need and bring together the good work done. Many members have spoken about the good work and practices that are under way. A plan could also include the recommendations from the ministerial working group and the committee's report.

Aberlour's briefing highlighted that a national strategy might also necessitate a prolonged period of further consultation and delay measures that need to be taken. Jamie Hepburn made that point. Nevertheless, the good recommendations that came from the report will be considered thoroughly by me and the rest of the Government.

Many members mentioned Aberlour's decision to close its young runaway refuge. We need to bottom out and better understand why services have struggled to remain sustainable. Indeed, Jayne Baxter made the point that we must understand properly why such services have not been as widely used as we would perhaps have liked or hoped that they would be.

On the Parliament's behalf, I will ask the expert group that has just reviewed child sexual exploitation to review the committee's recommendations. I will also ensure that the review includes a better understanding of what services are needed and works with local areas on their own provision.

Jackson Carlaw talked about risk of sexual harm orders. I said in my opening remarks that the Scottish Government has strengthened the laws around sex crimes. I am confident that Police Scotland shares our commitment to protecting our most vulnerable citizens and that it will consider carefully the committee's recommendations around risk of sexual harm orders, including any improvements that can be made. We are also considering whether there is scope more generally to extend the protection that is offered by such orders.

As others have mentioned, Graeme Pearson's comments and expertise on the issue were very useful in the debate. I agree that Mr Gwynne's role in CEOP offers us opportunities in Scotland.

Education has been a substantial theme in the debate. Graeme Pearson raised the issue of online safety, and Angus MacDonald and Jamie Hepburn mentioned concerns about that in their speeches. The recent summit on internet safety that I mentioned in an intervention on Graeme Pearson identified that better information sharing

between professionals, parents and young people is key to improving online safety, and the Scottish stakeholder group on child internet safety will take forward the recommendations of the summit this year.

Respectme and ChildLine are Government funded and are working hard with others to help people to tackle bullying behaviour in all forms and to deal with its consequences, while our schools will talk to children and young people about broader online risks. In relation to looked-after children, respectme is working with local authorities and residential care establishments to build the capacity and confidence to deal with all bullying. That is aligned to our much broader national approach.

Advice has been given to schools on how to encourage safe and responsible use of personal mobile technology in school and beyond, which is designed to protect staff, children and young people from harassment and abuse. That includes advice on the dangers of uploading indecent images, which can arise from the misuse of such technology. Nevertheless, an important balance needs to be struck. We must not overdramatise the safe use of the internet and push young people into being more secretive about their internet use. If we are to get the action absolutely right, young people's voices must be heard, and a key point that has come through is that we should not overdramatise internet safety and risk more young people being pushed into unsafe practices.

Liam McArthur: I thank the minister for addressing a concern that I tried to develop in my speech. Does she agree that there is a risk that, in providing overgeneralised comments on the risks of the internet and its safe usage, we might turn young people off to the actual risks? Is there not a need for us to be as specific as we can be in the advice that we provide about the nature of the risks that are undoubtedly out there?

Aileen Campbell: That point relates to the need to hear young people's voices on the types of things that they would like to engage with. It is why we had young people present at the summit that we hosted, and they made a number of very good points. We will always be playing catch-up with how the internet develops, so we must always be on the front foot with the issue. Liam McArthur's point is valid.

Aside from education's role in ensuring online safety, curriculum for excellence provides opportunities for education on appropriate relationships and health and wellbeing. Education Scotland supports that work by showcasing good practice via stakeholder networks and glow, the intranet.

George Adam, Jackson Carlaw, Anne McTaggart and Jamie Hepburn made some important points about parenting. It is right to broaden the interest in child sexual exploitation beyond the Government, as society has a role and families and parents have an important part to play. However, it is not easy for parents to talk about the issues, so we need to support them. The guidance on relationships, sexual health and parenthood education has been revised and we are currently reviewing the responses to a recent consultation with a view to issuing revised guidance in the spring.

The Presiding Officer: You should bring your remarks to a close, minister.

Aileen Campbell: The national parenting strategy is for all parents. There is a danger that we assume that the strategy is for only the parents of young people, but we have held a number of meetings and conferences on the parenting of teenagers.

Some important and valid points were made about data collection. We have the University of Bedfordshire work and the Forth valley pilot. Once we know the outcomes of that, we will be able to consider whether they could be appropriately used across Scotland. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill gives us further opportunities to talk about the issue, but we need to ensure that children are safe.

This is a good debate, but there is more work to be done. I again thank the committee for its work in ensuring that we cannot lose sight of the vile nature of child sexual exploitation and the importance of keeping children and young people safe.

16:50

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I believe that we all come to the Parliament, sometimes amid rhetoric and cosmetics, to try to make a difference—however big or small—to our fellow citizens. In this debate, we have collectively demonstrated the need to express that difference in the name of our children.

In 1997, Nelson Mandela said:

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Today's debate has exemplified, in the face of what was a very challenging inquiry, as John Wilson said, what that means for us and the society that we wish to reflect in Scotland.

I acknowledge, as the convener did, all those who participated in the inquiry, and particularly Barnardo's for bringing the petition to us.

The report is comprehensive, but before I address it, I congratulate all the participants in the debate. It is salutary to consider some of the words and phrases that have been used, such as “neglect”, “revulsion”, “disjointed”, “trust”, “lack of co-ordination” and “gaps” in communication. In particular, Jayne Baxter’s and Jackson Carlaw’s contributions are to be commended.

In the inquiry, we talked about not just cause and effect but the need for action above all. In many ways, the report considers the effects and recommendations to mitigate the effects, which I will come to, but the cause is just as important, and I would like to consider it first. I will therefore start, perversely, with part 5 of the report and how we can disrupt, prosecute and severely penalise the perpetrators. What I have to say must have some bearing—as I am sure it will—on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

As Angus MacDonald said, Daljeet Dagon of Barnardo’s explained that she had

“talked about the triangle approach that Barnardo’s developed, whereby the focus is on the victim but there is also recognition that there is a child sex offender and a facilitator. We have to flip the triangle over and focus on disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators, and we should identify locations”

where they will operate

“and police them better”.—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 11 June 2013; c 1434.]

That is not just for the police; it is also for the third sector agencies and families, as has been mentioned.

Police Scotland said that the wider community was pivotal in recognising and reporting CSE, but it was asked why the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 had not been used effectively, if at all. It is not acceptable that, if that act was to give new tools and powers to the police, freedom of information requests in 2012 found that, between them, Lothian and Borders Police and Strathclyde Police had issued only two RSHOs. The same applied to the sexual offence prevention orders. Only 1.05 per cent of offenders on the sex offenders register had SOPOs applied. I welcome Police Scotland’s commitment to secure additional mandatory training and highlight all the legislative options that are open to it, and its optimism—which, I am sure, is not misplaced—that the single service will ensure that Scotland has a wider approach to ensuring that victims are protected.

It is not just down to the police, of course; as I said, it is down to a multi-agency approach. That said, several, if not many, organisations, including the ministerial short-life working group, the national working group for sexually exploited children, the Office of the Children’s

Commissioner in the inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups, CEOP and the NSPCC, have assessed and reported on the effects of, and the leading up to, child sexual exploitation.

Of course, as I said, running in parallel with the committee’s inquiry and report was consideration of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, so it would be wrong to suggest that nothing is happening. Something is happening. For example, Barnardo’s Scotland has stated that it has

“established a partnership ... with Renfrewshire Council and the local police to better protect children who go missing, with a particular focus on CSE.”

In addition, the Glasgow child protection committee has taken a multi-agency approach to investigating CSE. However, it is too disparate and inconsistent, and it is frankly not as joined up as we might wish, as John Wilson pointed out.

Despite there being many examples of good practice across Scotland, the response is patchy and the various demands to address the support needs of children in a co-ordinated way were questioned by the committee. On addressing children’s needs and vulnerabilities, the training of those who are involved in detecting children targeted for CSE, supporting children who have experienced CSE, and disrupting and capturing actual and would-be perpetrators, the committee believed that all those areas were inadequately co-ordinated.

That is why the report suggests that there should in fact be, as has been mentioned, a national strategy for tackling child sexual exploitation. That should include an organisation to co-ordinate a national approach to tackling and preventing the enemy within that is CSE, and to support the victims. The committee noted that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill was imminent and it suggested that the serious issue of CSE should be considered as part of the scrutiny of the bill, or at least considered in tandem with that scrutiny.

A feature of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill is the requirement for a named person to consider a child’s interests. Within the committee’s proposal for a national framework, we suggest that the Government establish as soon as possible that a named person or overarching organisation be made directly responsible for the accelerated co-ordination and implementation of the process and the communication links to not reduce but eradicate the scourge of CSE from our communities.

However, for any strategy or organisation to be successful it must understand what the problem is and how it is defined. Of course, it is contiguous with sexual abuse, but it has a particular black form with the attendant material seductions. The

basis of any successful tactical operation that flows from the strategy must be a composite of the key elements that the committee considered for the proposed organisation and the critical factors in the recommendations.

I wish that I could say that I was delighted to participate in the inquiry, but delighted is the wrong word; it would be much more appropriate to say that the inquiry was harrowing. The inquiry could have done and dug so much more if it had had more time. The Government has accepted the committee's proposal to develop a framework, but the proposal for a co-operative organisation with clear responsibilities, required outcomes and a data mechanism to scope the challenge will be, on acceptance, a huge step forward. I welcome the proposed national plan.

I started with a quotation from Nelson Mandela and, if I may, I will finish with another. He said:

"Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation."

Hopefully, the Public Petitions Committee's report will go some way towards making sure that that does not happen.

We ignore the report at our peril. It is significant and the recommendations are highly significant. If they are not attended to, CSE will eat away at our social fabric and the social relationships therein. I would ask, I would encourage and I would plead that all members read the detail of the report—every word and recommendation—and understand what it means for our children and our society.

Children and Families Bill

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-08837, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Children and Families Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Children and Families Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 4 February 2013, relating to the retail packaging of tobacco, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Michael Matheson.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08859, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for tomorrow, Wednesday 29 January.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 29 January 2014—

delete

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health and Wellbeing

and insert

2.00 pm Member's Oath/Affirmation – Alex
Rowley

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions
Health and Wellbeing—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S4M-08840, in the name of David Stewart, on the Public Petitions Committee's report on tackling child sexual exploitation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Public Petitions Committee's 1st Report, 2014 (Session 4), *Report on tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland* (SP Paper 449).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08837, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Children and Families Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Children and Families Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 4 February 2013, relating to the retail packaging of tobacco, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2014

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08600, in the name of Stewart Maxwell, on Holocaust memorial day 2014. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 27 January 2014 marks Holocaust Memorial Day, the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and an opportunity for schools, colleges, faith groups and communities across Scotland to remember the six million men, women and children murdered by the Nazi regime in occupied Europe; further notes that the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2014 is "journeys"; values the Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz Project, which gives two post-16 students from every school and college in Scotland the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau; applauds Ruth Laird and William Seaborne, two students from Queen Anne High School in Dunfermline, who took part in the project and who will deliver the Parliament's Time for Reflection message on 21 January 2014; celebrates the Holocaust survivors who have enriched Scotland as a nation, and recommitments to ensuring that racism, sectarianism and bigotry are never allowed to go unchallenged in Scotland.

17:02

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):

Yesterday marked the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi concentration camp that has come to symbolise the brutal state-sponsored persecution and mass murder of over 6 million Jewish men, women and children. The 27th of January has become the international day of commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. Now in its 14th year, Holocaust memorial day gives us all an opportunity to pause and reflect on those atrocities, with commemoration events taking place in communities in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

In East Renfrewshire tonight, the council is holding its annual Holocaust memorial day event at St Ninian's high school. I represent East Renfrewshire as part of my West Scotland region, and it is also where I live with my family. Holocaust memorial day is always an important event in the area as it is home to Scotland's largest Jewish community. This year, two senior pupils from each of East Renfrewshire's seven secondary schools have been invited to talk about their experiences of the lessons from Auschwitz initiative. As members know, the lessons from Auschwitz project is organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, with the support of the Scottish Government, to enable Scotland's young people to gain first-hand knowledge of the horrors of the Holocaust.

I regret that I am not able to be at St Ninian's this evening to hear the personal reflections of those young people on how their trip to Auschwitz has affected each of them. It is crucial that young people are given the chance to learn about the atrocities of the Holocaust to help them to understand the importance of standing up to senseless hatred and discrimination. Having spoken with some of the pupils who have taken part in the lessons from Auschwitz initiative, it is clear to me that it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that will never be forgotten. It provides a vital link between the events of the past and the education of future generations.

Last week, we heard from William Seaborne and Ruth Laird, two pupils from Queen Anne high school in Dunfermline, who delivered time for reflection and told us about their experiences of visiting the former concentration camp. Ruth and William both provided moving accounts of the range of emotions that they felt whilst seeing at first hand the setting for one of the darkest moments in our history. They described it as an eye-opening experience, with the stories of those who lost their lives and those who managed to survive being both haunting and inspiring in equal measure.

We have come a long way in the 69 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, although subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur show that we must be resolute in our determination to challenge prejudice, hatred and intolerance.

The greatest weapon to protect against discrimination is education, which is why the work that the Holocaust Educational Trust does to preserve the lessons of the past is so valuable.

The theme of Holocaust memorial day this year is journeys. It offers a timely opportunity to pay tribute to the Holocaust survivors who managed to escape persecution and make new lives in Scotland. The date 9 November 2013 marked the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht, which is known as the night of broken glass, when the Nazis launched a series of co-ordinated attacks on Jewish people throughout Germany and Austria. Thousands of Jewish homes, businesses and places of worship were ransacked and burned to the ground.

Kristallnacht resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Jewish people during the attacks, and a further 30,000 Jews were forced from their homes and incarcerated at concentration camps. Many people consider it to mark the beginning of the Holocaust, and it led to the Kindertransport humanitarian rescue mission, which helped to save thousands of Jewish children from violent persecution.

It is estimated that more than 10,000 Jewish refugee children were separated from their parents and came to the UK as part of the Kindertransport initiative. Approximately 400 of those children came to live in Scotland. We can only imagine what it must have felt like for those children to say goodbye to their parents as they left for places unknown. It helped them to escape almost certain death, but many never saw their parents again.

A number of Kindertransport refugees stayed in Scotland to start families and make new lives for themselves, which greatly enriched our communities in the post-war years. When he was just 15, in 1939, Henry Wuga came to Scotland as a Kindertransport refugee from Nuremberg in Germany. I had the honour of hearing him speak during an event that the Association of Jewish Refugees held last year at Garnethill synagogue to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Now aged 89, Mr Wuga lives in East Renfrewshire with his wife Ingrid, who is also a survivor of the Holocaust. They met each other at a refugee club on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow and they have lived in Scotland ever since arriving here. They are now proud grandparents with two daughters and four grandsons. Mr Wuga was awarded an MBE for his work to help ex-servicemen and women who have lost limbs or the use of their limbs in the line of duty. He and his wife are also well known locally for their dedication to voluntary work and charitable causes over the years.

Mr Wuga regularly visits schools to talk to pupils about Kindertransport and the traumatic and dangerous experiences of being a Jewish child living in Nazi Germany. His testimony is compelling and offers an invaluable insight into life as a Kindertransport refugee coming to Scotland during the second world war.

Most of the Kindertransport survivors are in their late 80s and 90s, and the sad fact is that this will be the last major anniversary that many can take part in. I have spoken previously about gathering the voices—an archive project that records the first-hand accounts of men and women who fled Nazi persecution to come to Scotland. Mr Wuga's story is one of many that are available through the project, which ensures that his testimony and that of many others are preserved for future generations. I am proud to support the gathering the voices project and the work that it is doing to help to ensure that Holocaust survivors are remembered not just as victims but as people who were welcomed to our country and who contributed to making Scotland a better place to live in.

The atrocities of the Holocaust resulted in a loss of life that is almost too difficult to comprehend. It

is right that we refuse to allow those deaths to be in vain. Holocaust memorial day allows us to remember those who lost their lives, but it also gives us the opportunity to celebrate those who bravely resisted the Nazis and survived.

It is a reminder that we all have a responsibility to stand up to prejudice, hatred and intolerance in our society. It is a reminder of the importance of doing all that we can to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten.

17:09

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank Stewart Maxwell for bringing forward the debate and recognising in his motion the excellent and moving contribution from Ruth Laird and William Seaborne of Queen Anne high school at time for reflection last week.

Each year, we stop—for perhaps too short a moment—to reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust and on the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. We think of all those who perished—the Roma, the gays, the mentally and physically disabled and the Jews. Ruth Laird and William Seaborne spoke about one individual, Kitty Hart-Moxon, who 70 years ago endured two years in Auschwitz and survived the death march through the Sudeten mountains. She survived the Lublin ghetto and the Salzwedel concentration camp and now, aged 88, she continues to make it her life's work to tell the story of that period and to remind us all of a time that we must never forget. Her story is one of the many journeys recorded by the Holocaust Educational Trust whose work, along with that of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, is so vital in ensuring that we all know the true horror of that time and of the genocides since.

The human failings that led to the Holocaust are not limited to the past. In the past couple of weeks I have been struck by a couple of French words or phrases which have come to my attention. The first is “coup de blues”, which is a typically attractive French expression that is used to describe the very unattractive depression, or blues, that left France's first lady in hospital.

The second is the downright dangerous “la quenelle”, which is the repressed or suppressed Nazi salute that Nicolas Anelka recently used to celebrate scoring a goal in a football match. For those who are not familiar with it, the best description I have seen of la quenelle compares it to the way Peter Sellers uses his left arm to prevent his right arm from doing a Nazi salute in “Dr Strangelove”. The footballer denies any racist intent, but there is no doubting the link in many people's minds between the quenelle gesture and anti-Semitism.

I find it deeply worrying that in modern-day Europe people are prepared to be photographed pulling la quenelle in front of synagogues or former concentration camps. It is too easy for us to blame our woes on others and otherness—on immigrants from eastern Europe, on Muslims or on Jews.

I was shocked—as I know other members were—by the recent poll that found that 80 per cent of young people and half of all adults cannot name a single genocide that has taken place since the Holocaust. A third of all adults could not even provide a definition of genocide. That survey and the gestures that I have mentioned show why it is so important that we continue to mark Holocaust memorial day—because the lessons from that time remain as relevant today as ever.

The theme for this year's Holocaust memorial day is journeys, such as the journeys into the ghettos, the Kindertransport—excellently presented in Glasgow central station recently—the reunions in the years after the war and the audacious escapes by people such as Jack Kagan in Poland. There are journeys today too. Thousands are fleeing violence in Syria, Congo, Sudan and the Central African Republic.

I thank all the members who have taken the time to sign the book of commitment from the Holocaust Educational Trust, pledging ourselves to recognise the humanity that is scarred by racism and remembering the sacrifices of those who preceded us. For those who have yet to sign, the book is still available in my office and will be there all week. I am privileged to be able to support the motion that is before the Parliament.

17:12

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing the debate and on the excellence of his opening speech.

The Holocaust or Shoah was specifically a Jewish experience and the full weight of Nazi terror was directed against the Jewish people. Last year, I read two books on the Jewish communities of Europe before the Holocaust: "On The Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War" by Bernard Wasserstein, and "Yiddish Civilisation: The Rise and Fall of a Forgotten Nation" by Paul Kriwaczek.

"On The Eve" details the increasing sense of foreboding and impending catastrophe among many of Europe's Jewish communities in the late 1930s, caused by not just the rise of Hitler but a growing and almost endemic anti-Semitism across much of Europe, and feelings of claustrophobia, as Jewish people seeking physical security, let alone a better life, often had nowhere to go.

Countries across the world, including the United States and the UK, severely restricted Jewish immigration, while France and the Netherlands set up internment camps for Jews who were escaping from Germany. As portrayed in the 1976 film, "Voyage of the Damned", in 1939 the SS St Louis carried 937 Jewish refugees from Hamburg to Cuba, which refused to take any, as did the US. Eventually a few nations, including the UK, took several hundred refugees. The rest returned to Hamburg and 254 later perished in the Holocaust.

After Kristallnacht, in the months before the commencement of hostilities, the UK did allow 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children to come to the UK in what was known as the Kindertransport, which has already been mentioned. Most of those children became orphans when the parents they had to leave behind were murdered by the Nazis.

The book "Yiddish Civilisation" explores the incredible religious, cultural and political diversity of the Jewish people—a people that has lasted for centuries and once numbered some 10 million. The Holocaust, assimilation, emigration and decades of Communist repression led to Yiddish becoming very much a minority language, although the culture lives on and is undergoing something of a revival.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest concentration camp in Europe—this death camp held more than 90,000 prisoners at any one time. Between 1.1 million and 1.6 million people are estimated to have been exterminated at Auschwitz-Birkenau during the war. Ninety per cent of those people were of Jewish descent. The remaining 10 per cent who were murdered there were Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, the disabled, Polish patriots and those who acted against the Nazi regime.

Auschwitz is the most notorious Nazi death camp but, ironically, that is probably because there were about 7,000 survivors who lived to tell the tale. A further 1.8 million Jewish men, women and children were exterminated in camps such as Belzec, Chelmno and Treblinka, where a total of only 42 people are known to have survived. One of the two survivors of Belzec, out of at least 434,000 people who were sent there, was Chaim Hirszman, who was murdered the year after the war ended by anti-Semitic Poles.

A further 3 million Jewish people were starved, beaten, shot or worked to death in labour camps and in ghettos or killed in huge forest massacres such as Babi Yar in Ukraine, Ponary in Lithuania and Maly Trostenets in Belarus. Often, local collaborators aided those killings, enriching themselves in the process.

There were many individual tragedies. For example, on 24 February 1942, the MV Struma,

which was carrying 791 Jewish refugees and crew, was refused access to Palestine by the British and was then sunk by a Soviet submarine. All but one person aboard the MV Struma died.

We should remember that there were many Jewish people who were heroic not only in resisting the Nazis—such as the Bielski brothers—but in fighting to save their families. Indeed, the many Gentiles who assisted them were heroic too. However, we should also realise that the Holocaust never left many of the people who suffered from it. After the writer Primo Levi threw himself to his death in 1987, Elie Wiesel commented:

“Primo Levi died at Auschwitz forty years earlier”.

Richard Glazar, the architect who survived Treblinka, was one of many others who killed himself, so the Holocaust never left people.

We must recognise those who suffered through the Holocaust yet live on as witnesses to the atrocities that occurred throughout Europe. Their persecution teaches us the horrifying consequences of unimpeded racism, hatred and bigotry. Holocaust memorial day is a call to the people of Scotland to stand against prejudice and intolerance every day. As Robert Burns opined,

“Man’s inhumanity to Man
Makes countless thousands mourn!”

We must try to make the world a better place. Holocaust memorial day reminds us of the consequences of not so doing.

17:17

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I have spoken before of my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2009, as other members have spoken of their visits over the years. At the time of my visit, a debate had begun—one that was touched with obvious controversy—on the future conservation of the Nazi concentration and death camp. Just as the shadows lengthen and the people who have first-hand recollections of what was suffered and—by a few—endured there, pass into history, so too have the buildings that constitute the camp begun rapidly to disintegrate.

Auschwitz-Birkenau, along with Dachau, Theresienstadt and a handful of other camps—several dozen—remain. For 70 years, they have served not just as a testament to what was done, but often as painful but necessary destinations to visit, for those who survived to remember those who did not survive, and for the families of those who survived to bear witness and—in some all too painful cases—to speak words of farewell at the location of their forebears’ darkest hours. Other camps—for, example, Sobibor and Treblinka—exist no more, because they were ruthlessly

demolished and concealed at a point in the rout of Nazi Germany when the retreat of Hitler’s armies was not yet confused or panicked.

Many in Parliament have borne witness to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the striking and harrowing images, remnants and sense of evil that emanate from that place. More than 1 million people died—were murdered—there. Today, the annual number of visitors exceeds that figure, and the infrastructure is crumbling. Since my visit in 2009, the number of buildings that are open to the public has been further restricted, and anyone with an eye for these things can see that it will soon not be safe for any of the buildings to be available to those visiting.

The discussion over what to do has been resolved in favour of restoration. That decision cannot have been easy. With the Polish Government appealing for \$150 million to preserve something so ghastly, it is a thought that, however correct it is, must have troubled the soul. On balance, however, it is the right decision. Germany has pledged \$80 million, the United States has pledged \$15 million and Poland has pledged \$13 million. At least 23 other countries, including the United Kingdom, have pledged considerable sums, in addition to those.

Work has begun. By last summer, only three of the 45 brick barracks could be entered safely, and an immediate restoration of the others is under way at a cost of \$1 million per barrack, each barrack having housed 700 victims at a time. The ruins of the gas chambers, which were sinking significantly, have now had their foundations underpinned.

The hundreds of thousands of personal effects, many of which have lain untouched since being collected and displayed decades ago, are receiving individual attention. For example, each of the 100,000 shoes that were left behind at the war’s end takes some two hours of careful cleaning and, even now, there has been the heart-stopping revelation of a note from history—the testimony of one desperate individual, that had been tucked into the sole of a shoe, being discovered seven decades after the liberation, and brought to public light.

I say with a heavy heart that it is the right decision. That is not because I believe any longer that the history of Nazi Germany and its genocidal extermination of 6 million Jews across Europe can or will be forgotten; it is more because Auschwitz remains as a grotesque physical representation of what evil is capable of. It has to be seen to be believed in its scale and, uncomfortably, in its proximity to the normal life of those who lived adjacent to it and carried on in ignorance or fear of—or complicity in—what was happening on the other side of the perimeter wall. It has evolved into

a place of education and, in the darkest sense, of memorial. However, it must surely be an exception, if not the only one.

I can find far less excuse or rationalised argument for the debate arising from the gruesome find in the Bavarian national museum in Munich of a Nazi guillotine that was used to behead one of Hitler's youngest and bravest opponents, Sophie Scholl, her brother Hans and other members of the White Rose group in 1943. Perhaps 1,500 others were also executed by that vile instrument. The options that are under consideration appear to be to hide it away or to put it on display. Franz Josef Müller, who at 89 is the last surviving member of the White Rose group, has argued that

"no entertainment should be made of their violent deaths".

Surely he is right. What, other than a puerile sense of the macabre, will draw people to a museum that is exhibiting a guillotine—the blade and apparatus of which dispatched so many to their deaths? There is a sharp distinction between the restoration of Auschwitz-Birkenau—which is being undertaken with the support of the international community—and the tawdry lust for a good turnout at a local town museum, however well intentioned the exhibition's aims.

All those who died defenceless and without compassion or reason at the hands of the Nazis deserve to be honoured and remembered in perpetuity. Official memorials where tributes can be paid, sites of historical significance, or much more personal tributes, are appropriate. However, as I said when I began my remarks, as the shadows lengthen, let us resist and argue against theatre and entertainment being made inappropriately or unintentionally. Instead of hiding away that guillotine or displaying it, let it be destroyed.

Stewart Maxwell's motion, on which I, too, congratulate him, invites us to celebrate

"the Holocaust survivors who have enriched Scotland as a nation",

and recommits us

"to ensuring that racism, sectarianism and bigotry are never allowed to go unchallenged in Scotland."

Let us do that with respect, humility and determination.

17:23

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing this important debate and on the excellence of his speech. Indeed, all the speeches that have gone before mine have been excellent.

The stigmatisation of the Jews did not, of course, begin with the rise of Hitler. For many centuries, the Jews of Europe were marginalised, persecuted and called names. Ultimately, that is what led to their being slaughtered at a rate of 9,000 a day in the Nazi death factories. It is therefore our duty as European citizens to ensure that we fight anti-Semitism as a particular type of racism that is deeply embedded in our shared history. I am pleased to say that its influence has been waning for many years, but we must not become complacent and we must always be ready to root out this evil, which is Europe's great historical shame. For that reason, I endorse the concerns that Ken Macintosh expressed about anti-Semitism raising its head in our national game of football.

Our Jewish community in Scotland is small, but it will always remain an important part of our country's rich tapestry. One of the most notable members of the community was a man whom I particularly admired: the late Professor David Daiches of Edinburgh, the son of a Lithuanian-born rabbi. His father believed that there was a strong mutual respect between Jews and Scottish Presbyterians, both of whom revered the Old Testament. He also noted that Scotland was one of the few countries in medieval Europe that never drafted a state law persecuting Jews.

It is important that we continue to make no distinction between people on the grounds of their religion, culture, colour or ethnicity. It is significant that the Declaration of Arbroath, which tends to be remembered for other reasons, also has a little-remembered passage in which it notes that God makes no distinction between

"Jew and Greek, Scotsman or Englishman".

There is never room for complacency and, in recent years, small far-right groups have made attempts to demonise other religions in the same way that Judaism has been demonised. We must all stand up against that, so I am pleased that every party that is represented in the chamber has done so.

With that in mind, I will use the debate to commemorate some of those who stood up against the evil of the Holocaust. Some of them were household names, such as Oskar Schindler, but others are less well known, although their bravery is equally deserving of commemoration.

Although Oskar Schindler survived the war, many righteous Gentiles paid the ultimate price. One such individual was Jane Haining, who was a Scot from Dumfriesshire in the South Scotland region that I represent. Born in 1897 in Lochenhead farm, Dunscore, she became a carer at a young age when her mother died in childbirth, leaving seven children. After excelling

academically at Dumfries academy, Jane worked as a secretary in Glasgow and for the church. Her church work and love of children took her to Budapest in Hungary in 1932, when she became matron of a school and home for orphaned Jewish girls aged 6 to 16. There were 315 students in her charge, 48 of them boarders.

When war broke out, the Church of Scotland advised its missionaries to leave Hungary, but Jane declined. She had heard stories of Nazi brutality towards Jewish people and wrote to a friend:

“If these children need me in days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in days of darkness?”

Jane worked on despite police surveillance and with little food and resources. She made trips to the market at 5 am to find food for her girls and patched up her students’ worn-out shoes with her own leather suitcases.

In March 1944, German troops overthrew the pro-Nazi Government in Hungary and, in April that year, Jane was arrested by the Gestapo. She was accused of working among the Jews and showing sympathy for the children by crying when they were forced to wear the star of David.

Jane was sent to Auschwitz and never returned. She was dead within three months—August 1944—and one of the most shocking things that reading about her death brought home to me is that, during the three months for which she was in Auschwitz, 1.3 million people died in the camp with her. Jane was one of millions, but every one of those millions who were murdered was a unique human being.

Many more Jewish Scots have relatives who were murdered and many more are themselves descended from Holocaust refugees. Other members mentioned the Kindertransport initiative in which young Jewish children were evacuated from occupied Europe after Kristallnacht. One of my most moving experiences as a journalist was writing an anniversary piece about the Kindertransport about 20 years ago. I interviewed a lady in Lanarkshire who had come to Scotland as a very young child—perhaps five or six. By that time, she was an elderly lady with a Scottish husband and several children and grandchildren. She began to describe her memories of Kristallnacht and, as a five-year-old, of witnessing a group of Nazi soldiers surround an old Jewish man. They taunted him and she described how they took out a lighter and set his beard on fire.

Telling the story all those years later, that elderly lady became completely traumatised and we had to end the interview. The scars had remained with her all her life. That is why we should not cover up the scar that the Holocaust left on Europe and the lives that it snuffed out with such brutality.

I will finish with the words of the late Ernest Levy, one of Scotland’s leading Jewish citizens who, like Jane Haining, was taken from Budapest to Auschwitz. He explained why he wrote of his dreadful experiences:

“We are trying to tell the world so this cannot happen again and we have learned a lot, although many have still not learned from the past”.

17:29

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Stewart Maxwell for securing this historic debate on Holocaust memorial day.

Despite all the recorded history, there are still a few people who question whether the Holocaust took place. That, in itself, is quite horrible to me. I have seen films and documentaries and read books on the subject. As a child, I used to wonder how human beings could treat other human beings in such a way. I could never understand it, and I still do not understand it, despite the fact that I am a part of a minority community and have had a slight glimpse of what can happen when things go wrong. I have seen the heart of Europe being torn apart, and genocide taking place in the modern world. It is, therefore, not very difficult to understand and believe what happened in relation to the genocides that took place—the horror, the suffering, the pain, the inhumanity to humans. I have to say that I am still moved, to this day, when I think about the difficulties and the hardships that people went through. I was particularly moved when I saw films that showed the effects on young children. I am sure that those children carried the scars all their lives and that it was difficult and challenging for them to live fruitful and meaningful lives after those experiences.

It is shameful that, despite the experiences that we have seen, people still continue to hurt one another. I still do not understand why it happens. Kenneth Macintosh is right to point to the horrors that happen in Africa and other parts of the world today. I always ask myself why we are not learning the lessons and why these things are still going on. The United Nations does its best, under difficult circumstances. There is a lot going on in international politics. However, what happened in the Holocaust was beyond what is happening in the world today. It is very important that we never allow ourselves and other people to forget that, if we allow hatred to perpetuate, it can go to that extreme. That is something that I have always carried in my heart. I will always be a witness and I will always remind others of the slippery slope that people can allow themselves to go down. Hatred and the horror of continuous barbarity towards human beings need to be challenged at all times.

My friends, Judith Tankel and Henry Tankel, were my heroes. They were an example of a

Jewish family who worked in the community tirelessly, and I turned to them on many occasions for advice and guidance. Their loss will always be a loss to me and to the community.

Today, I want to say that we should always remember our past and guard against repeating it in the future, to ensure that we do not allow human beings again to go down the route that they did at that time.

All that I want to add to the fine words that people have spoken today is that we should always stand up and be counted and always remind people of the horrors that took place, so that we do not allow them to be repeated.

17:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I also congratulate Stewart Maxwell on securing the debate. I join others in recognising Holocaust memorial day and the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

My family, of course, was fortunate enough not to experience the trauma of the Holocaust, and I am grateful for that. However, it is at this time that we honour and remember the 6 million men, women and children who were less fortunate than ourselves and paid the price of Nazi oppression.

Ken Gibson mentioned some people affected beyond the Jews—the Gypsies and the disabled—but there were also mentally ill or mentally disabled people, and gays. A wide range of people in that last 10 per cent suffered the ultimate fate of the hatred that the Nazis had for them.

The Holocaust has touched Scotland in many ways, and it continues to have a lasting impact on our young people. Last week, Ruth Laird and William Seaborne spoke to Parliament, and that was an appropriate thing for them to do. They come from Queen Anne high school, where my mother taught 80-plus years ago. I am sure that she would have very much admired the spirit in which they spoke to Parliament. They tried to put themselves in others' shoes and to live some of the experience of people in the concentration camp. William spoke of his great uncle, who was a survivor. He had never met him, but that is an important link to the past for youngsters today.

I read my first political book, a biography of Lloyd George, when I was seven. On the back of that and having watched "The Brains Trust" on the BBC on a Sunday afternoon—Jakob Bronowski used to refer, in that forum, to his family's experience at Auschwitz—I thought that I should try and read some of the political books that had affected the 20th century. I started with "Das Kapital"—in English, I hasten to add—which I found very difficult to read. I got "Mein Kampf"

from the library and managed to read three chapters, before my utter disgust at its content—it got worse as it went on—made it unreadable for me. My sensibilities found it intolerable.

Jakob Bronowski was a very intellectual man, and covered a wide range of different subjects. He came to these islands in the 1920s and was not personally involved in the Holocaust, but many of his relatives were. When he recorded "The Ascent of Man", a great history of the human race from its origins to its present situation, he visited Auschwitz. One of the most moving things that I have ever seen on television was Jakob Bronowski at the camp, speaking off the cuff. He did not use a script in the series at all, and wrote the book afterwards, based on what he had said. He looked at the camera, and said nothing. He stooped down, put his hand in a puddle and lifted up some mud. He looked at the mud in his hand and said, "This is my family." That is the most moving thing that I have ever seen on television. It resonates with me to this day.

Something else that means something to me involves a survivor of the concentration camps—a Russian Jew who left Russia at the time of the revolution because he had criticised the new regime. He came to Germany for safety, ironically, and then criticised the Nazis and got put in a concentration camp. That was Jakob Trachtenberg. To keep himself sane, he used his time in the concentration camp to develop new mathematical algorithms for training young people how to do arithmetic—some good has come.

We must protect the memory of the evil that happened in the Holocaust. The end of the motion before us talks about

"the Holocaust survivors who have enriched Scotland as a nation",

and recommitting the Parliament

"to ensuring that racism, sectarianism and bigotry are never allowed to go unchallenged in Scotland."

I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say—I am sure that it will be of interest.

17:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I, too, offer my congratulations to Stewart Maxwell on securing the debate, and to all members who have participated. Clearly, this is a subject that unites all the members in the chamber and makes them think about the issues that it presents.

The theme of today's Holocaust memorial day is journeys. There is a sense in which we all talk about the journey of understanding that we have been on to understand the sheer scale, size and horror of the Holocaust. Mr Malik referred to that,

and to the way in which it is difficult for the mind to grasp that horror.

Journeys have other meanings, too. There is the other journey of genocide, which is represented by the end of the track at Birkenau. I was there this year; I will talk about that in a moment. At the end of the track there were two enormous gas chambers and one individual who, as people came out of the carts in which they had travelled across Europe, chose who lived and who died. That was the journey of genocide. It is an extraordinary fact that the vast majority of people who arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau were dead within two hours. It was a real Holocaust—an enormous death, which took place almost instantly.

Journeys can be journeys of survival and hope. Some people, although very few, escaped from the camp and some, although very few, survived. Some escaped mentally by writing about what they saw and what they heard while in the camp, even though the penalty for the possession of writing instruments was death.

Journeys of survival have been referred to, such as the Kindertransport, whereby 10,000 mainly Jewish children were offered a new life in a new country. About 400 of them settled in Scotland, many in Glasgow, and helped make this country the diverse and inclusive country that we have today.

Last October I went to Auschwitz with the lessons from Auschwitz project, which is organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust and part funded by the Scottish Government. Every year the Scottish Government helps hundreds of secondary 5 and secondary 6 pupils make that journey and it supports them to go on to be ambassadors for the project, teaching others about the importance of understanding and of never forgetting.

Visiting Auschwitz is something that I wanted to do and which I am glad that I have done, but I did not aspire to do it. Those who have been there will recognise what I mean; it is an absolutely overwhelming experience. The details and images of the visit will stay with me forever.

Different aspects of the visit moved different people. For some it was the poignancy of photographs of loved ones—there are big displays of photographs of individuals who died there. For others it was the things like the piles of shoes, which were mentioned, or the two places in Auschwitz where one is not allowed to take photographs—one is the gas chamber at the original Auschwitz camp and the other is a room that displays human hair in a glass case right along the length of the room. All that human hair came from individuals who died in the gas

chambers and it then went to stuff mattresses, which became a commodity.

For me, it was the symbols of journeys that were perhaps the most touching. When one thinks for a moment what people expected when they went on the journey to a concentration camp and then sees what they took with them, it is staggering. People had their house keys in their pockets, which were taken away from them. People who left their homes locked their doors, expecting to return home.

There is a room there that has suitcases and bags along one wall. Many members know that I post a photograph every day of something that I see on a website called blipfoto. My photograph on 30 October last year was of that display of suitcases. In the middle there was a suitcase with a name on it—a number of the suitcases had names on them. The name was Raphaela Sara Tausik. That suitcase represented her personal journey from Vienna. She had a suitcase full of her possessions and her clothes and it had her name on it. She thought that she was being relocated. She thought she might go home, but she ended up on the railway tracks at Birkenau; she ended up in the gas chambers.

The guides and members of the Holocaust Educational Trust who take people round seek constantly to rehumanise what happens. That is why I mentioned her name. I will mention it again: Raphaela Sara Tausik. I have never seen her photograph. She is on the major database, but I do not know what she looked like. We should think of her as an individual with a full, rich, detailed life—a woman who thought that she was carrying on with her life but whose life ended suddenly and arbitrarily in great distress.

Those young people who take part in the Holocaust Educational Trust trips become ambassadors. Yesterday I was with two of them in Tarbert academy in my constituency: Rose Richmond and Hannah Prill. I went because they were holding an assembly and they had created an artwork of handprints. I went to add my handprint to the canvas, which says, “When we understand where prejudice leads, we can stop it in its tracks.”

That takes me back to those railway tracks. If we understand where prejudice leads, we can understand that even the smallest prejudice can grow beyond all expectations and lead to death and disaster. It leads, ultimately, to Auschwitz. It also leads to the end of those tracks and to the most memorable thing about the visit that I paid. At the end of a long, cold October day at the site—it is enormous; the size really strikes one initially—it became very dark. Our whole group stood where the railway tracks finish, between the two enormous gas chambers. We all lit a small candle,

and Rabbi Andrew Shaw, from a synagogue in the south of England, led a small service. He told his personal story, which was astonishing.

Rabbi Shaw's grandfather and grandmother were married in Vienna in 1939. They were told that their future was very doubtful, and indeed, within a fortnight of being married his grandfather was arrested and taken away. A neighbour—a young woman—said to his grandmother, "If you stay you will die. I have a ticket and a visa to go somewhere. Take it. Go." His grandmother did that, and the place to which she went, which she had never heard of, was Glasgow. She had only just arrived when she fell ill, and while she was in hospital she discovered that she was pregnant. She knew nothing about what had happened to her husband, although she wrote to him every week, telling him how she was doing and telling him that she had given birth. At the end of the war, it transpired that he had died within a fortnight of arriving in Germany.

She felt, and said to her children and grandchildren, that the real issues that came out of Auschwitz were not evil and prejudice but pride and hope. There is pride that survival took place. Despite the worst that anyone could imagine, the Jewish nation survived. Jews continued; Roma continued; life continued. And there is still hope, despite the worst that human beings can do to other human beings.

Those were the odd things that I learned at Auschwitz. As we walked away, leaving our candles on the railway tracks, and walked towards the light and back into the world, we thought about the Holocaust not with despair—certainly with anguish, but not with despair—but with pride in the survival of the human race and with hope for our future. Even the great evils of the Holocaust and the continuing genocide to which Mr Macintosh referred do not extinguish humanity.

If we take that message every single Holocaust memorial day, and if we continue on our journey to eliminate prejudice, we will be doing the right thing, whereby we can build a better world.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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